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WOODROW WYATT

LETTER FROM FRANCE

DEAR B.—Forgive me if I answer your letter publicly, but I've had several letters asking the same sort of questions and I haven't time to answer them all—and yours asks them the most bluntly.

'It does excite me your being in the front line,' you say. 'I want to know—what do you feel when you see people dead and above all what feelings do you have when you actually kill someone. . . . Tell me about the Germans, the expression on their faces. . . . I can't wait to hear some hundred per cent news on what is really happening, and who to believe: the reporters who say the French are sniping away like mad and resenting and hating your arrival and that the Germans have behaved very well or the ones who say that the French are in ecstasies over you boys at being liberated, but why having their homes blasted to hell should make them this way I can't follow. . . .'

You will think I'm rather a fraud because I'm not in the front line and never have been. Up till now I've been a staff officer with a vehicle made up as an office to work in and almost as comfortable as in England. I've always fed in a mess and had a shower when I wanted one and only for the first four or five weeks did I have to sleep in a slit trench—ever since I've had a tent. I've done no marching, no crawling in the fields. I didn't even land on D-Day but on D+6. All the same I suppose I know a little about the unpleasant side of war although I've never killed a German—only a very small number of people in this impersonal war can say they have. I think I've met two. In the front line you hardly ever see the Germans unless they have surrendered and there's no cold steel. If a party of Germans do show themselves you may see some fall when you fire at them but whose bullet killed them no one ever knows. No it is a different process. Suppose there are a group of Germans in a wood. It is bombed and it is shelled. Then the infantry with or without tanks go forward. If all goes well the Germans withdraw and the only ones left are ready to give themselves up. If it goes badly the German automatic and small arms fire kills and wounds so many infantry that they have to stop. Maybe they go back to where they started or perhaps they try to get round behind the Germans. If they are

lucky the Germans leave the wood or surrender. If they are unlucky the Germans make it too hot for them to advance any further. Sometimes it happens that our infantry take the wood, and the Germans make a sudden counter-attack using the same methods, and the machinery is reversed. The only reason why either side ever leave a place is because they will be killed if they stay there and that is also the only reason why the other side don't go into it. It's got nothing to do with bayonet charges or man-to-man fighting. If you don't believe me go and look at Lebissey Wood just north of Caen after the war and see the shell and bomb holes every yard or so and then consider whether you would have stayed there waiting for someone to arrive with a bayonet.

I was surprised to find war both less and more frightening than I expected. It was less frightening because the shells and bombs didn't come directly at you very often and there were long periods when we were probably safer than London was with the flying bombs. It was more frightening because when they did fall near it was absolute terror. I crouched in a slit trench plotting the course of each whine and thinking this time it's a direct hit. The deadliest things are the anti-personnel bombs. They fall in clusters spattering shrapnel at all heights from nought to ten feet and the only protection is to be below ground.

Another frightening thing is driving along a road that is being shelled. I did this a lot in the early period of our advance. It was amazing how the traffic blocks that the staffs had been moaning about for days disappeared whenever the shelling started. Then the only vehicles to be seen were single ones going very fast and one or two burning out on the side of the road. On a road like that there are always recognized shelling centres and it is unnerving to go through a village and see a wall suddenly collapse across the street a hundred yards ahead; to pass craters in the road still smoking from newly fallen shells and to hear them landing on either side just behind you.

But that kind of war is probably over for the staffs now. It was a freak period for the headquarters of Divisions and Corps to be three to four miles from the front line and within easy shelling range—caused by the lack of room in the tiny bridgehead. Now they are spaced out again and administrative units and rear echelons no longer jostle the forward troops like a crowd on the way to a football match.

What impresses me most about the front line is not violence but the absence of it. When the battle was stationary for a while I often drove down to visit the forward units. The approach was always the same. The quick change from the hubbub and noise of the jumbled convoys in the back areas to roads deserted save for an occasional civilian walking very slowly. A few cattle in the fields grazing among the dead and swollen bodies of their fellows, but no farm workers. A complete silence—not even the sound of birds, a sense of being in an unreal world with no life, so that even the people in the villages timidly looking out of their shell-damaged houses don't seem alive. There is no reality because no one is doing his normal job. Even the war does not exist—until you see a notice 'You are in sight of the enemy now' and a little further on 'Drive slowly—dust causes shells', and then a few steel-helmeted soldiers cautiously poking their heads out of slit trenches to see who is going by. At my destination the same slightly eerie atmosphere would persist. I would park my car very carefully out of sight behind some bushes or a wall and walk across to the Headquarters. There I would find the people I was looking for in a dugout or an armoured vehicle, oppressed by the same feelings as my own and talking quietly as though afraid the enemy across the fields or on the other slope of the hill opposite might overhear. The opening exchange of courtesies wasn't the weather but 'How many times have you been shot up today?' followed by a visit to the latest shell or mortar holes, much as one might go and see how the sweet peas were coming on in a country garden. Sometimes, before I left, the stillness would be broken by the enemy's 'Moaning Minnies' (multi-barrelled mortars) and we would scatter for the slit trenches, becoming aware of life again through the attempt to destroy it.

'What do you feel when you see people dead?'

Just an urgent desire to get by quickly and a feeling of revulsion which is greater or less according to the length of time the body has been dead. Rotting corpses, cattle or soldiers, distend and putrefy and their faces become liquescent flesh covered with crawling flies and maggots. There is no difference in appearance between decomposing men and decomposing animals and the same stench comes from both of them.

I feel worse when I see someone not physically but morally dead. In the last war it was called 'shell-shock'; now it is 'exhaustion case' or colloquially 'bomb happy'. It happens when a man can no longer stand the shells and bombs and the nearness of death. He loses control of his limbs, he surrenders everything to the torture of fear and his mind abdicates his body. I once gave one of them a lift. He was a tall man and I saw him being dragged along by two stretcher-bearers, his feet shuffling about while they held him up by his arms slung round their shoulders. They humped him into the front of the jeep where he lay twitching, gangling and pitiful, his head hanging loosely over the back of the seat. Every time a shell exploded in the distance the whole of his body contorted sharply, became almost rigid and upright, then went loose again. His face was blotched and unshaven, without characteristics, and his long arms and legs hung expressionlessly from his body. As we drove he groaned continuously and earthy non-human sounds came out of his dropped mouth. When we reached a first-aid post we pushed him out of the jeep and tried to lay him on the ground but he resisted, his legs and arms waved violently and he tried to sit up, groaning louder in panic. He was conscious of nothing—like a decapitated chicken which runs convulsively in the farmyard for a few minutes before it falls. Until he had slept and rested for a fortnight he would remain a whimpering heap and perhaps he will always start and jump at noise.

You ask me what the Germans look like. I don't know what they look like when they're fighting or sitting behind their lines, but I do know what they look like when they've been taken prisoner. You must remember that a large part of the German Army is made up of impressed men from occupied territory—Poles, Jugoslavs, Russians, Czechs. Sometimes there are as many as 30 per cent of these in the formations facing us. Naturally they tend to give themselves up soonest, and when they do they sit about the prisoner-of-war cage dazed and apprehensive. When they've been given something to eat and they realize they're not going to be treated unkindly they brighten considerably and laugh and chatter like children, jumping up eagerly whenever one of the guards gives them a job to do.

The Germans proper are in two categories—the ordinary conscript and the S.S. The former look similar to their alien comrades although a little cleaner and more intelligent. They don't talk

much and seem apathetic and relieved to be out of the war after five years of it. They go on obeying orders and fighting, not from malice or perverseness, but because it is outside their comprehension and will to do otherwise.

The S.S. are very different. They are usually young, not out of their 'teens. In appearance they are pale and thin with long hair brushed back from their foreheads. They are very dirty and smell—presumably because many of them have a code never to wash and they live up to it. While they don't look like Nietzsche's 'jubilant monsters' it is quite probable that they really have 'come from a ghastly bout of murder, arson, rape and torture'. Before they leave a town, if there is time, they ransack it. The details have been published often so I will only tell you a few of the things I have come across. At Messey they ran through the streets firing into the windows and pulling out the women—one woman there told me how she had lain under the table as they fired shots in the wall behind her and followed it by throwing in incendiary grenades. At Caen in the houses they had taken over they left their excreta smeared on the floors and sometimes on the linen and just before we went in they drove the people into the caves and went through the houses senselessly smashing the furniture and destroying anything of value. At Flen after the air raid on D-Day they set fire to any of the houses in the centre of the town that hadn't been hit. In one village, because somebody annoyed them they drove the thousand inhabitants into one building and burnt it down. When the S.S. are fighting they keep firing their weapons until they are surrounded—then they suddenly surrender before they can be killed. Once prisoners they try to look unconcerned and to demonstrate, with a half sneer, that they are still the Herrenvolk. They don't mix with the other prisoners, but stand apart despising everything. They are the deliberately created 'Dead End Kids' who have had their vices encouraged and praised as virtues by the authorities, and it will be a remarkable reformatory that will ever persuade them of anything else.

About the French. For the first six weeks at least we were definitely unpopular in many parts of the newly liberated areas and in the regions immediately behind them. Understandably so. During the occupation the Germans *did* behave very well—especially in the coastal districts where they were anxious to avoid

B

trouble from the civil population during invasion. They stayed in their camps and barracks and didn't obtrude into the life of the community. In all their contacts they were extremely polite and took great pains not to offend against local customs and pride. M. le Maire was respected. German soldiers didn't get drunk, didn't loot, didn't rape and demanded nothing. So long as the French didn't interfere with the activities of the Army they were secure and unmolested—it was only the members of the Resistance Movement who were caught who suffered. More than that—the Germans bought farm produce in large quantities and paid very well for it, and there was plenty of work to be had in the factories and with contractors working for the Germans. In the country there was prosperity and the prospect of it continuing—particularly as Germany deported little forced labour from among the farm workers. The country people, being materialistic, weren't discontented and it didn't matter who was in control while there was a good return for their work. Government for such people is a distant thing, a matter of names. They are concerned with the effects on them personally and these were good.

With our arrival this vanished. They were plunged into some of the greatest destruction of the war. Their villages and little towns were obliterated by air, sea and land. Their homes were destroyed, hundreds of them were killed, their cattle were slaughtered in the fields, their crops devastated, their orchards ruined, their roads torn up. They were driven away from their farms and their livelihood. Neither the big towns like Caen nor the Germans could buy what they had to sell even in those rare instances where they could go on producing it. Every big attack meant more huge bombardments with more mutilation of the property and land of a people highly endowed with the sense of property—and all day and night the noise of explosions was in their ears. At the beginning, too, there was some looting by soldiers and the digging up of potatoes and vegetable crops was common. It didn't compare favourably with the Germans and liberation was hardly preferable to occupation. As the mass of soldiers, equipment, vehicles, tanks, poured into a very small area the civilians felt enmeshed in a fearful military machine and they remembered the Anzio beach-head and other Allied invasions which had clung to the coast for several months before any general advance took place. The Germans had anticipated that

feeling by sticking up posters just before the invasion showing a snail crawling up the map of Italy with a Union Jack in one nostril and a Star-Spangled Banner in the other and underneath the words: 'The speed of a snail is 0.9 km. a day'. They remembered, too, that before the Germans left they had been confident that the bridgehead couldn't be held and that in a very short time they would be back again.

The bombing of the towns was hard for them to understand. When a town with only twenty-five Germans in it has been flattened and many French people killed it is difficult to explain that the object was not in fact to kill them, but to stop the Germans bringing reinforcements through it for a vital forty-eight hours. An English woman living inland told me that after some of the raids people would say, 'When they come we won't welcome them—we'll spit in their faces'. And the German poster displayed everywhere, showing Joan of Arc, her hands manacled, burning at the stake with blazing Rouen Cathedral in the background and the caption 'The Assassins always return to the scene of their crime' may have had some effect. If bitterness is not to continue after the war and be a hindrance to Anglo-French relations it should be explained clearly and frequently, as it can be, why it was necessary 'for their homes to be blasted to hell', as you say in your letter, and why it was an inevitable part of Allied strategy that they should be.

Not every one felt this way, probably not the majority, and from the first there was much friendliness and pleasure that we had landed. And when it became clear that we weren't going to be driven into the sea, that the great break-through was succeeding, the whole atmosphere altered. Men and women stood on the sides of the road laughing and waving and making the 'V' sign at passing columns. At every newly captured village there was tremendous enthusiasm. The people came out on the street, smothered the soldiers with kisses and embraces, gave them wine, shouted 'Bravo', cheered and clapped, threw flowers and sometimes almost impeded the advance in their excitement. Even in Caen the inhabitants were wild with happiness for several days after we went in and I didn't see a single house that hadn't been damaged in some way. For the most part the streets and houses were brickdust and rubble. At the moment of success the fear that the whole of France was destined to be a battleground,

over which the machinery of war would slowly tear its way for months, disappeared. Now, the emotions you would expect from a people just freed from an invader were displayed without reservation and with all the appearances of being genuine—the farther inland, the greater the display. This doesn't mean that the French changed overnight—it is natural to applaud success and I have no doubt that illwill still exists in many places, particularly in the country.

I have never found any corroboration for stories about French snipers. There may be some among the followers of Doriot and Déat but they are more likely to shoot other Frenchmen than Allies. It is a pity all collaborationists don't take to sniping, then the solution to the problem of dealing with them would be the simple one of shooting back. As it is, the problem of deciding when a patriot ceases to be a patriot and becomes a collaborationist is beyond solution. In 1940 the people were bewildered and frightened, England was nearly beaten and it looked as though the Germans had come for ever. It was useless to go on, they thought, they must make the best of it. They had to live, and how could they help it if their work was useful to the Germans? What good would it do anyone if they starved or went to prison? Was Petain, whom many thought sincerely did what he could for France, and even said 'No' to Hitler sometimes, a collaborationist? It was only the men with the strength to be fanatics who joined the Resistance Movement and carried on the fight direct, and they are a fairly small number in any community. Most of the others passively acquiesced to the new régime in varying degrees—usually just enough to get by. A few of the women lived with German soldiers, perhaps because their husbands were prisoners of war or there weren't enough men to go round or because they had no money. That is simple, and the French have shaved their heads. You don't see them about much because they're staying in their homes until their hair grows again, but when you do you feel that everyone is degraded by the insult and that it is futile. But, what is to be done with a man like this? He was a contractor in a very large way in Paris. At the end of 1940 a collaborationist visited him and asked him if he would be willing to build aerodromes and other military works for the Germans. He said he didn't know, he would think about it. The emissary returned in a few days and told him that if he wouldn't

do it he would be imprisoned and someone else would be made head of the firm. Whatever he did, he thought, the work would be done just the same so it might as well be he who did it. The job was fantastically profitable and after a while he came to the man who told me this story and said: 'I'm making 50,000 francs profit a day. I've never made so much money before. I don't know what to do with it.' 'I do,' said my friend, and the contractor regularly gave him millions of francs which he used for the purposes of the Resistance Movement. Later he gave him opportunities to photograph the blue prints of his constructions, to see the latest types of planes, and helped him get other valuable information. Then he asked how he could sabotage the runways, and was told instead to build them as strongly as possible because the Allies would soon be needing them. Everyone in Paris knowing what his firm was doing and seeing him about with the Germans, thought him an arch-collaborationist. There are hundreds like this man. Immediate action will no doubt have to be taken against the most obvious traitors, but for the rest there should be an interval so that all the evidence can be sifted and events examined without prejudice.

I'm sorry to be so disappointing about the glamour of the front line and war in liberated countries but it just isn't that way. In a Staff job it can be exciting and occasionally frightening but on the whole it's very undramatic. And with slightly more intensity and a great deal more discomfort I think it's much the same in a unit that's actually fighting. I'm due to go to an infantry battalion soon so I shall find out. In the meanwhile try and agitate for the Ministry of Information to write and distribute in France a simple booklet¹ explaining the reasons for the sinking of the fleet at Oran, the occupation of Syria and North Africa, the wilderness in Normandy, the bombing of the towns. It is needed and it will do as much good as foodstuffs and the rehabilitation of industry.

Yours ever,

WOODROW'

¹ Such a book exists. It is M. René Balbaud's *L'Entente à l'Epreuve*, published by the Oxford University Press, and copies are available in France—

Editor, HORIZON

GEORGE ORWELL

RAFFLES

AND MISS BLANDISH

NEARLY half a century after his first appearance, Raffles, 'the amateur cracksman', is still one of the best-known characters in English fiction. Very few people would need telling that he played cricket for England, had bachelor chambers in the Albany and burgled the Mayfair houses which he also entered as a guest. Just for that reason he and his exploits make a suitable background against which to examine a more modern crime story such as *No Orchids for Miss Blandish*. Any such choice is necessarily arbitrary—I might equally well have chosen *Arsène Lupin*, for instance—but at any rate *No Orchids* and the Raffles books¹ have the common quality of being crime stories which play the limelight on the criminal rather than the policeman. For sociological purposes they can be compared. *No Orchids* is the 1939 version of glamourized crime, *Raffles* the 1900 version. What I am concerned with here is the immense difference in moral atmosphere between the two books, and the change in the popular attitude that this probably implies.

At this date, the charm of *Raffles* is partly in the period atmosphere, and partly in the technical excellence of the stories. Hornung was a very conscientious and on his level a very able writer. Anyone who cares for sheer efficiency must admire his work. However, the truly dramatic thing about Raffles, the thing that makes him a sort of by-word even to this day (only a few weeks ago, in a burglary case, a magistrate referred to the prisoner as 'a Raffles in real life'), is the fact that he is a *gentleman*. Raffles is presented to us—and this is rubbed home in countless scraps of dialogue and casual remarks—not as an honest man who has gone astray, but as a public-school man who has gone

¹*Raffles*, *A Thief in the Night* and *Mr. Justice Raffles*, by E. W. Hornung. The third of these is definitely a failure, and only the first has the true Raffles atmosphere. Hornung wrote a number of crime stories, usually with a tendency to take the side of the criminal. A successful book in rather the same vein as *Raffles* is *Stingaree*.

astray. His remorse, when he feels any, is almost purely social: he has disgraced 'the old school,' he has lost his right to enter 'decent society', he has forfeited his amateur status and become a cad. Neither Raffles nor his Bunny appears to feel at all strongly that stealing is wrong in itself, though Raffles does once justify himself by the casual remark that 'the distribution of property is all wrong anyway'. They think of themselves not as sinners but as renegades, or simply as outcasts. And the moral code of most of us is still so close to Raffles's own that we do feel his situation to be an especially ironical one. A West End clubman who is really a burglar! That is almost a story in itself, is it not? But how if it were a plumber or a greengrocer who was really a burglar? Would there be anything inherently dramatic in that? No—although the theme of the 'double life', of respectability covering crime, is still there. Even Charles Peace in his clergyman's dog-collar seems somewhat less of a hypocrite than Raffles in his Zingari blazer.

Raffles, of course, is good at all games, but it is peculiarly fitting that his chosen game should be cricket. This allows not only of endless analogies between his cunning as a slow bowler and his cunning as a burglar, but also helps to define the exact nature of his crime. Cricket is not in reality a very popular game in England—it is nowhere near so popular as football, for instance—but it gives expression to a well-marked trait in the English character, the tendency to value 'form' or 'style' more highly than success. In the eyes of any true cricket-lover it is possible for an innings of ten runs to be 'better' (i.e., more elegant) than an innings of a hundred runs: cricket is also one of the very few games in which the amateur can excel the professional. It is a game full of forlorn hopes and sudden dramatic changes of fortune, and its rules are so ill-defined that their interpretation is partly an ethical business. When Larwood, for instance, left a trail of broken bones up and down Australia, he was not actually breaking any rule: he was merely doing something that was 'not cricket'. Since cricket takes up a lot of time and is rather expensive to play, it is predominantly an upper-class game, but for the whole nation it is bound up with such concepts as 'good form', 'playing the game', etc., and it has declined in popularity just as the tradition of 'don't hit a man when he's down' has declined. It is not a twentieth-century

game, and nearly all modern-minded people dislike it. The Nazis, for instance, were at pains to discourage cricket, which had gained a certain footing in Germany before and after the last war. In making Raffles a cricketer as well as a burglar, Hornung was not merely providing him with a plausible disguise; he was also drawing the sharpest moral contrast that he was able to imagine.

Raffles, no less than *Great Expectations* or *Le Rouge et le Noir*, is a story of snobbery, and it gains a great deal from the precariousness of Raffles's social position. A cruder writer would have made the 'gentleman burglar' a member of the peerage, or at least a baronet. Raffles, however, is of upper-middle class origin and is only accepted by the aristocracy because of his personal charm. 'We were in Society but not of it', he says to Bunny towards the end of the book; and 'I was asked about for my cricket'. Both he and Bunny accept the values of 'Society' unquestioningly, and would settle down in it for good if only they could get away with a big enough haul. The ruin that constantly threatens them is all the blacker because they only doubtfully 'belong'. A duke who has served a prison sentence is still a duke, whereas a mere man-about-town, if once disgraced, ceases to be 'about town' for evermore. The closing chapters of the book, when Raffles has been exposed and is living under an assumed name, have a twilight of the gods feeling, a mental atmosphere rather similar to that of Kipling's poem, *Gentleman Rankers*,

A trooper of the forces—

I, who kept my own six horses! etc.

Raffles now belongs irrevocably to the 'cohorts of the damned'. He can still commit successful burglaries, but there is no way back into Paradise, which means Piccadilly and the M.C.C. According to the public-school code there is only one means of rehabilitation: death in battle. Raffles dies fighting against the Boers (a practised reader would foresee this from the start), and in the eyes of both Bunny and his creator this cancels his crimes.

Both Raffles and Bunny, of course, are devoid of religious belief, and they have no real ethical code, merely certain rules of behaviour which they observe semi-instinctively. But it is just here that the deep moral difference between *Raffles* and *No Orchids* becomes apparent. Raffles and Bunny, after all, are gentlemen,

and such standards as they do have are not to be violated. Certain things are 'not done', and the idea of doing them hardly arises. Raffles will not, for example, abuse hospitality. He will commit a burglary in a house where he is staying as a guest, but the victim must be a fellow-guest and not the host. He will not commit murder¹ and he avoids violence wherever possible and prefers to carry out his robberies unarmed. He regards friendship as sacred, and is chivalrous though not moral in his relations with women. He will take extra risks in the name of 'sportsmanship', and sometimes even for æsthetic reasons. And above all he is intensely patriotic. He celebrates the Diamond Jubilee ('For sixty years, Bunny, we've been ruled over by absolutely the finest sovereign the world has ever seen') by despatching to the Queen, through the post, an antique gold cup which he has stolen from the British Museum. He steals, from partly political motives, a pearl which the German Emperor is sending to one of the enemies of Britain, and when the Boer War begins to go badly his one thought is to find his way into the fighting line. At the front he unmaskes a spy at the cost of revealing his own identity, and then dies gloriously by a Boer bullet. In this combination of crime and patriotism he resembles his near-contemporary Arsène Lupin, who also scores off the German Emperor and wipes out his very dirty past by enlisting in the Foreign Legion.

It is important to note that by modern standards Raffles's crimes are very petty ones. Four hundred pounds' worth of jewellery seems to him an excellent haul. And though the stories are convincing in their physical detail, they contain very little sensationalism—very few corpses, hardly any blood, no sex crimes, no sadism, no perversions of any kind. It seems to be the case that the crime story, at any rate on its higher levels, has greatly increased in bloodthirstiness during the past twenty years. Some of the early detective stories do not even contain a murder. The Sherlock Homes stories, for instance, are not all murders, and some of them do not even deal with an indictable crime. So also with the John Thorndyke stories, while of the Max Carrados stories only a minority are murders. Since 1918,

¹He does once contemplate murdering a blackmailer. It is, however, a fairly well-established convention in crime stories that murdering a blackmailer 'doesn't count.'

however, a detective story not containing a murder has been a great rarity, and the most disgusting details of dismemberment and exhumation are commonly exploited. Some of the Peter Wimsey stories, for instance, centre round macabre practical jokes played with corpses. The Raffles stories, written from the angle of the criminal, are much less anti-social than many modern stories written from the angle of the detective. The main impression that they leave behind is of boyishness. They belong to a time when people had standards, though they happened to be foolish standards. Their key phrase is 'not done'. The line they draw between good and evil is as senseless as a Polynesian taboo, but at least, like the taboo, it has the advantage that everyone accepts it.

So much for *Raffles*. Now for a header into the cesspool. No *Orchids for Miss Blandish*, by James Hadley Chase, was published in 1939, but seems to have enjoyed its greatest popularity in 1940, during the Battle of Britain and the blitz. In its main outlines its story is this:

Miss Blandish, the daughter of a millionaire, is kidnapped by some gangsters who are almost immediately surprised and killed off by a larger and better organized gang. They hold her to ransom and extract half a million dollars from her father. Their original plan had been to kill her as soon as the ransom money was received, but a chance keeps her alive. One of the gang is a young man named Slim whose sole pleasure in life consists in driving knives into other people's bellies. In childhood he had graduated by cutting up living animals with a pair of rusty scissors. Slim is sexually impotent, but takes a kind of fancy to Miss Blandish. Slim's mother, who is the real brains of the gang, sees in this the chance of curing Slim's impotence, and decides to keep Miss Blandish in custody till Slim shall have succeeded in raping her. After many efforts and much persuasion, including the flogging of Miss Blandish with a length of rubber hosepipe, the rape is achieved. Meanwhile Miss Blandish's father has hired a private detective, and by means of bribery and torture the detective and the police manage to round up and exterminate the whole gang. Slim escapes with Miss Blandish and is killed after a final rape, and the detective prepares to restore Miss Blandish to her family. By this time, however, she has developed such a taste for Slim's caresses that she feels unable to live without him, and she jumps out of the window of a skyscraper.

Several other points need noticing before one can grasp the full implications of this book. To begin with, its central story bears a very marked resemblance to William Faulkner's novel, *Sanctuary*. Secondly, it is not, as one might expect, the product of an illiterate hack, but a brilliant piece of writing, with hardly a wasted word or a jarring note anywhere. Thirdly, the whole book, *récit* as well as dialogue, is written in the American language: the author, an Englishman who has (I believe) never been in the United States, seems to have made a complete mental transference to the American underworld. Fourthly, the book sold, according to its publishers, no less than half a million copies.

I have already outlined the plot, but the subject-matter is much more sordid and brutal than this suggests. The book contains eight full-dress murders, an unassessable number of casual killings and woundings, an exhumation (with a careful reminder of the stench), the flogging of Miss Blandish, the torture of another woman with red-hot cigarette ends, a strip-tease act, a third-degree scene of unheard-of cruelty, and much else of the same kind. It assumes great sexual sophistication in its readers (there is a scene, for instance, in which a gangster, presumably of masochistic tendency, has an orgasm in the moment of being knifed), and it takes for granted the most complete corruption and self-seeking as the norm of human behaviour. The detective, for instance, is almost as great a rogue as the gangsters, and actuated by nearly the same motives. Like them, he is in pursuit of 'five hundred grand'. It is necessary to the machinery of the story that Mr. Blandish should be anxious to get his daughter back, but apart from this such things as affection, friendship, good nature or even ordinary politeness simply do not enter. Nor, to any great extent, does normal sexuality. Ultimately only one motive is at work throughout the whole story: the pursuit of power.

It should be noticed that the book is not in the ordinary sense pornography. Unlike most books that deal in sexual sadism, it lays the emphasis on the cruelty and not on the pleasure. Slim, the ravisher of Miss Blandish, has 'wet, slobbering lips': this is disgusting, and it is meant to be disgusting. But the scenes describing cruelty to women are comparatively perfunctory. The real high-spots of the book are cruelties committed by men upon other men: above all the third-degreering of the gangster,

Eddie Schultz, who is lashed into a chair and flogged on the windpipe with truncheons, his arms broken by fresh blows as he breaks loose. In another of Mr. Chase's books, *He Won't Need It Now*, the hero, who is intended to be a sympathetic and perhaps even noble character, is described as stamping on somebody's face, and then, having crushed the man's mouth in, grinding his heel round and round in it. Even when physical incidents of this kind are not occurring, the mental atmosphere of these books is always the same. Their whole theme is the struggle for power and the triumph of the strong over the weak. The big gangsters wipe out the little ones as mercilessly as a pike gobbles up the little fish in a pond; the police kill off the criminals as cruelly as the angler kills the pike. If ultimately one sides with the police against the gangsters it is merely because they are better organized and more powerful, because, in fact, the law is a bigger racket than crime. Might is right: *vae victis*.

As I have mentioned already, *No Orchids* enjoyed its greatest vogue in 1940, though it was successfully running as a play till some time later. It was, in fact, one of the things that helped to console people for the boredom of being bombed. Early in the war the *New Yorker* had a picture of a little man approaching a news-stall littered with papers with such headlines as GREAT TANK BATTLES IN NORTHERN FRANCE, BIG NAVAL BATTLE IN THE NORTH SEA, HUGE AIR BATTLES OVER THE CHANNEL, etc. etc. The little man is saying, 'Action Stories, please'. That little man stood for all the drugged millions to whom the world of the gangsters and the prize-ring is more 'real', more 'tough' than such things as wars, revolutions, earthquakes, famines and pestilences. From the point of view of a reader of *Action Stories*, a description of the London blitz, or of the struggles of the European underground parties, would be 'sissy stuff'. On the other hand some puny gun-battle in Chicago, resulting perhaps in half a dozen deaths, would seem genuinely 'tough'. This habit of mind is now extremely widespread. A soldier sprawls in a muddy trench, with the machine-gun bullets crackling a foot or two overhead, and whiles away his intolerable boredom by reading an American gangster story. And what is it that makes that story so exciting? Precisely the fact that people are shooting at each other with machine guns! Neither the

soldier nor anyone else sees anything curious in this. It is taken for granted that an imaginary bullet is more thrilling than a real one.

The obvious explanation is that in real life one is usually a passive victim, whereas in the adventure story one can think of oneself as being at the centre of events. But there is more to it than that. Here it is necessary to refer again to the curious fact of *No Orchids* being written—with technical errors, perhaps, but certainly with considerable skill—in the American language.

There exists in America an enormous literature of more or less the same stamp as *No Orchids*. Quite apart from books, there is the huge array of 'pulp magazines', graded so as to cater for different kinds of fantasy, but nearly all having much the same mental atmosphere. A few of them go in for straight pornography, but the great majority are quite plainly aimed at sadists and masochists. Sold at threepence a copy under the title of *Yank Mags*¹, these things used to enjoy considerable popularity in England, but when the supply dried up owing to the war, no satisfactory substitute was forthcoming. English imitations of the 'pulp magazine' do now exist, but they are poor things compared with the original. English crook films, again, never approach the American crook film in brutality. And yet the career of Mr. Chase shows how deep the American influence has already gone. Not only is he himself living a continuous fantasy-life in the Chicago underworld, but he can count on hundreds of thousands of readers who know what is meant by a 'clipshop' or the 'hotsquat', who do not have to do mental arithmetic when confronted by 'fifty grand', and understand at sight a sentence like 'Johnnie was a rummy and only two jumps ahead of the nut-factory'. Evidently there are great numbers of English people who are partly Americanized in language and, one ought to add, in moral outlook. For there was no popular protest against *No Orchids*. In the end it was withdrawn, but only retrospectively, when a later work, *Miss Callaghan comes to Grief*, brought Mr. Chase's books to the attention of the authorities. Judging by casual conversations at the time, ordinary readers got a mild thrill out of the obscenities in *No Orchids*, but saw nothing

¹They are said to have been imported into this country as ballast, which accounted for their low price and crumpled appearance. Since the war the ships have been ballasted with something more useful, probably gravel.

undesirable in the book as a whole. Many people, incidentally, were under the impression that it was an American book reissued in England.

The thing that the ordinary reader *ought* to have objected to—almost certainly would have objected to, a few decades earlier—was the equivocal attitude towards crime. It is implied throughout *No Orchids* that being a criminal is only reprehensible in the sense that it does not pay. Being a policeman pays better, but there is no moral difference, since the police use essentially criminal methods. In a book like *He Won't Need It Now* the distinction between crime and crime-prevention practically disappears. This is a new departure for English sensational fiction, in which till recently there has always been a sharp distinction between right and wrong and a general agreement that virtue must triumph in the last chapter. English books glorifying crime (modern crime, that is—pirates and highwaymen are different) are very rare. Even a book like *Raffles*, as I have pointed out, is governed by powerful taboos, and it is clearly understood that Raffles's crimes must be expiated sooner or later. In America, both in life and fiction, the tendency to tolerate crime, even to admire the criminal, so long as he is successful, is very much more marked. It is, indeed, ultimately this attitude that has made it possible for crime to flourish upon so huge a scale. Books have been written about Al Capone that are hardly different in tone from the books written about Henry Ford, Napoleon, Lord Northcliffe and all the rest of the 'log cabin to White House' brigade. And switching back eighty years, one finds Mark Twain adopting much the same attitude towards the disgusting bandit Slade, hero of twenty-eight murders, and towards the Western desperadoes generally. They were successful, they 'made good', and therefore he admired them.

In a book like *No Orchids* one is not, as in the old-style crime story, simply escaping from dull reality into an imaginary world of action. One's escape is essentially into cruelty and sexual perversion. *No Orchids* is aimed at the power-instinct, which *Raffles* or the Sherlock Holmes stories are not. At the same time, the English attitude towards crime is not so superior to the American as I may have seemed to imply. It, too, is mixed up with power-worship, and has become more noticeably so in the last twenty years. A writer who is worth examining is Edgar

Wallace, especially in such typical books as *The Orator* and the Mr. J. G. Reeder stories. Wallace was one of the first crime-story writers to break away from the old tradition of the private detective and make his central figure a Scotland Yard official. Sherlock Holmes is an amateur, solving his problems without the help and even, in the earlier stories, against the opposition of the police. Moreover, like Dupin, he is essentially an intellectual, even a scientist. He reasons logically from observed fact, and his intellectuality is constantly contrasted with the routine methods of the police. Wallace objected strongly to this slur, as he considered it, on Scotland Yard, and in several newspaper articles he went out of his way to denounce Holmes by name. His own ideal was the detective-inspector who catches criminals not because he is intellectually brilliant, but because he is part of an all-powerful organization. Hence the curious fact that in Wallace's most characteristic stories the 'clue' and the 'deduction' play no part. The criminal is always defeated by an incredible coincidence, or because in some unexplained manner the police know all about the crime beforehand. The tone of the stories makes it quite clear that Wallace's admiration for the police is pure bully-worship. A Scotland Yard detective is the most powerful kind of being that he can imagine, while the criminal figures in his mind as an outlaw against whom anything is permissible, like the condemned slaves in the Roman arena. His policemen behave much more brutally than British policemen do in real life—they hit people without provocation, fire revolvers past their ears to terrify them, and so on—and some of the stories exhibit a fearful intellectual sadism. (For instance, Wallace likes to arrange things so that the villain is hanged on the same day as the heroine is married.) But it is sadism after the English fashion: that is to say it is unconscious, there is not overtly any sex in it, and it keeps within the bounds of the law. The British public tolerates a harsh criminal law and gets a kick out of monstrously unfair murder trials: but still that is better, on any count, than tolerating or admiring crime. If one must worship a bully, it is better that he should be a policeman than a gangster. Wallace is still governed to some extent by the concept of 'not done'. In *No Orchids* anything is 'done' so long as it leads on to power. All the barriers are down, all the motives are out in the open. Chase is a worse symptom than Wallace,

to the extent that all-in wrestling is worse than boxing, or Fascism is worse than capitalist democracy.

In borrowing from William Faulkner's *Sanctuary*, Chase only took the plot; the mental atmosphere of the two books is not similar. Chase really derives from other sources, and this particular bit of borrowing is only symbolic. What it symbolizes is the vulgarization of ideas which is constantly happening, and which probably happens faster in an age of print. Chase has been described as 'Faulkner for the masses', but it would be more accurate to describe him as Carlyle for the masses. He is a popular writer—there are many such in America, but they are still rarities in England—who has caught up with what it is now fashionable to call 'realism', meaning the doctrine that might is right. The growth of 'realism' has been the great feature of the intellectual history of our own age. Why this should be so is a complicated question. The interconnection between sadism, masochism, success-worship, power-worship, nationalism and totalitarianism is a huge subject whose edges have barely been scratched, and even to mention it is considered somewhat indelicate. To take merely the first example that comes to mind, I believe no one has ever pointed out the sadistic and masochistic element in Bernard Shaw's work, still less suggested that this probably has some connection with Shaw's admiration for dictators. Fascism is often loosely equated with sadism, but nearly always by people who see nothing wrong in the most slavish worship of Stalin. The truth is, of course, that the countless English intellectuals who worship dictators are not different from the efficiency experts who preached 'punch', 'drive', 'personality' and 'learn to be a Tiger Man' in the nineteen-twenties, nor from that older generation of intellectuals, Carlyle, Creasey and the rest of them, who bowed down before German militarism. All of them are worshipping power and successful cruelty. It is important to notice that the cult of power tends to be mixed up with a love of cruelty and wickedness *for their own sakes*. A tyrant is all the more admired if he happens to be a bloodstained crook as well, and 'the end justifies the means' often becomes, in effect, 'the means justify themselves provided they are dirty enough.' This idea colours the outlook of all sympathizers with totalitarianism in any of its forms.

Until recently the characteristic adventure stories of the

English-speaking peoples have been stories in which the hero fights *against odds*. This is true all the way from Robin Hood to Popeye the Sailor. Perhaps the basic myth of the Western world is Jack the Giant Killer. But to be brought up to date this should be renamed Jack the Dwarf Killer, and there already exists a considerable literature which teaches, either overtly or implicitly, that one should side with the big man against the little man. Most of what is now written about foreign policy is simply an embroidery on this theme, and for several decades such phrases as 'play the game', 'don't hit a man when he's down' and 'it's not cricket' have never failed to draw a snigger from anyone of intellectual pretensions. What is comparatively new is to find the accepted pattern according to which (a) right is right and wrong is wrong, whoever wins, and (b) weakness must be respected, disappearing from popular literature as well. When I first read D. H. Lawrence's novels, at the age of about twenty, I was puzzled by the fact that there did not seem to be any classification of the characters into 'good' and 'bad'. Lawrence seemed to sympathize with all of them about equally, and this was so unusual as to give me the feeling of having lost my bearings. Today no one would think of looking for heroes and villains in a serious novel, but in lowbrow fiction one still expects to find a sharp distinction between right and wrong and between legality and illegality. The common people, on the whole, are still living in the world of absolute good and evil from which the intellectuals have long since escaped. But the popularity of *No Orchids* and the American books and magazines to which it is akin, shows how rapidly the doctrine of 'realism' is gaining ground.

Several people, after reading *No Orchids*, have remarked to me, 'It's pure Fascism'. This is a correct description, although the book has not the smallest connection with politics and very little with social or economic problems. It has merely the same relation to Fascism as, say, Trollope's novels have to nineteenth-century capitalism. It is a daydream appropriate to a totalitarian age. In his imagined world of gangsters Chase is presenting, as it were, a distilled version of the modern political scene, in which such things as mass bombing of civilians, the use of hostages, torture to obtain confessions, secret prisons, execution without trial, floggings with rubber truncheons, drownings

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in cesspools, systematic falsification of records and statistics, treachery, bribery and quislingism are normal and morally neutral, even admirable when they are done in a large and bold way. The average man is not directly interested in politics, and when he reads he wants the current struggles of the world to be translated into a simple story about individuals. He can take an interest in Slim and Fenner as he could not in the G.P.U. and the Gestapo. People worship power in the form in which they are able to understand it. A twelve-year-old boy worships Jack Dempsey. An adolescent in a Glasgow slum worships Al Capone. An aspiring pupil at a business college worships Lord Nuffield. A *New Statesman* reader worships Stalin. There is a difference in intellectual maturity, but none in moral outlook. Thirty years ago the heroes of popular fiction had nothing in common with Mr. Chase's gangsters and detectives, and the idols of the English liberal intelligentsia were also comparatively sympathetic figures. Between Holmes and Fenner on the one hand, and between Abraham Lincoln and Stalin on the other, there is a similar gulf.

One ought not to infer too much from the success of Mr. Chase's books. It is possible that it is an isolated phenomenon, brought about by the mingled boredom and brutality of war. But if such books should definitely acclimatize themselves in England, instead of being merely a half-understood import from America, there would be good grounds for dismay. In choosing *Raffles* as a background for *No Orchids* I deliberately chose a book which by the standards of its time was morally equivocal. *Raffles*, as I have pointed out, has no real moral code, no religion, certainly no social consciousness. All he has is a set of reflexes—the nervous system, as it were, of a gentleman. Give him a sharp tap on this reflex or that (they are called 'sport', 'pal', 'woman', 'king and country' and so forth), and you get a predictable reaction. In Mr. Chase's books there are no gentlemen, and no taboos. Emancipation is complete, Freud and Macchiavelli have reached the outer suburbs. Comparing the schoolboy atmosphere of the one book with the cruelty and corruption of the other, one is driven to feel that snobbishness, like hypocrisy, is a check upon behaviour whose value from a social point of view has been underrated.

ROBERT GATHORNE-HARDY

A LETTER TO A PAINTER

ON THE ORIGIN AND NATURE OF ART

YOU may remember how, some months ago, we talked over a 'natural' theory of art which I put forward. It's not very long since I finished writing it down, and got the essay—about the length of a short novel—typewritten. I thought of sending you a copy; but when I came to read it through for correction, I felt that, as it stood, it wouldn't do. This wasn't just a matter of art—of verbal infelicities and faults of construction; you, as an artist, could easily allow for the uncouth passages left in a work still unfinished. But I found in places that the thought wasn't consistent, and that some of my facts were, if not incorrect, at least defective. These faults were due to my method of construction; I'd had to call on many subjects and sciences, and in my wartime anxiety to get the work done, I had written and learned at the same time. The discovery of these faults was rather vexing; but I was glad to find that the correction of them never controverted or, so far as I could see, invalidated the marrow of my theory. However, since the torso is not as yet fit for your eyes, I've decided to send you in this enormous letter a précis of my essay as, if time and occasion spare me, I intend to make it (at any rate, the whole work is rather large to afflict a busy friend with suddenly).

The presentation of any theory, however simple, on so broad a subject, needs, if it's to convince, innumerable examples and illustrations from many sides of knowledge; deductions of what its acceptance would involve should also be brought in. All, or almost all such props I've had to discard, so as to keep this letter more or less within reasonable bounds. I'm forced to state my case in a dogmatic form; but I've put in just a few facts, and one or two deductions of the many that I've used (and I've no doubt that you'll be able to fill in many gaps from your own knowledge). Though the hypothesis may not therefore appear so plausible as I'd have liked, I think I've given you the main skeleton of it. I must ask you to do your own part in making the dry bones live.

The fact and incident which first sent my thoughts along this track may seem a little off the point. During a digression in a first-aid course, our lecturer told us that left-handed children, if they are forced to behave right-handedly, are very apt to become stammerers; and the cause of this was not psychological but physiological. A right-handed man controls his more delicate gestures and actions (such as writing or painting) with an area on the left side of his brain; he speaks with the same area; cruder movements are directed from a corresponding area on the right. In a left-handed man these areas are transposed in function; accordingly, if he uses his right hand as a normal man would, the ill-used limb of the brain may revolt. This is roughly the state of affairs (the brain, according to what I've been taught, is more versatile in its different parts than in my statement I've seemed to imply); when I learned this, I realized, with a shock of enchanted inspiration, that many delicate human activities need not be, as I'd meekly and modernly assumed, the results of spiritual frustration; they may well be caused by the actual physical configuration of our brains. This little curiosity of medicine taught me also another important thing—that the linking or association of the arts, which we feel so strongly, has an anatomical basis and cause. The fruits of gesture and the fruits of speech—music, literature, and the visual arts, are all conceived, or at least brought to fruition, in much the same neighbourhood of the brain.

I'd never been satisfied with any general theory of art that I'd come across; many have seemed to me wrong-headed, or even pernicious, and still more of them just plain down right silly. To me the answer given by psychoanalysis has always appeared inadequate. Would it not be possible, I began reflecting, to form a theory of art, a 'natural' theory, which allowed only of the animal or prehuman attributes of man? Would it not be possible to find among animals—and so by analogy among our prehistoric, half-man forbears—in rudiment at least, all aspects of what we know as art? After a little thought I came on a solution which seemed to satisfy me; much reading and much rumination have served only to amplify my first main idea, and this is what I'm inclined to believe as to what might be called the palæontology of art:

In our æsthetic activities are to be found vestiges of decorative

courting activities of the beasts (by 'courting' you must understand not only the actions and accompaniments of wooing, but other connubial activities connected with family life: and also communal ceremonies which are sometimes to be found among gregarious animals. This is straining the word, I know, but the convenience is worth the cost; like Humpty Dumpty, I pay twice. By 'decorative' I mean displays of emotional and not physical strength; though here it must be remembered that some ceremonial antics are very likely derived from ritual of more direct violence). Early men used these same powers for magical purposes, and when, indulging an instinct commonly to be found among animals, they *played* at magic, the result was pure art. This, roughly, is the pedigree which I submit: courtship, magic, art.

It wasn't difficult to sort out the practices and attributes of animals which could most easily be reckoned as corresponding to the art of men; they reduced themselves to music, dance, and the display of inherited ornament; but, as with the word 'courtship', these heads must be allowed a very wide interpretation.

The animals whose behaviour has been studied and observed in most detail are, of course, the birds, among whom the display of almost æsthetic activities reaches its highest development under man. Birds, however, are not allowed by any serious theory of evolution to be among our ancestors; they are most likely offshoots of the reptiles, springing, it has been said, from the dinosaurs. If, however, it could be shown that music, dance, and visual display were practised by animals which represent our most probable ancestors, then it would be justifiable to draw conclusions from these activities as they are practised by birds. Just so, as an approach to human physiology, we dissect the bodies of cousins and collaterals in the animal world.

The pursuit was fascinating; it was also salutary, for it taught me to recognize in most human behaviour—even in its high and seemingly sophisticated manifestations—the ancestral beast; and I have learnt to watch with pleasure the harmless antics in me of ancestors incalculably ancient.

I discovered that snails have a courtship, and that some squids allure their mates with a dazzle of bright colour. And need I mention the marvellous and often musical world of eye-delighting insects? Frogs and toads have an amorous music, and many a fish

performs routine movements in courtship; males of the giant Galapagos tortoises call to their silent mistresses with thunderous and uncouth love-songs, harsh and hideous to human ears. Fish often assume bright colours in the mating season, and a few are known which, even in the quietness of their especial element, can make sounds whereby to summon their mates. The display of pattern and colour, of particular sounds, and of formal movement, arouse an emotional response, it appears, among almost all animals that have an organized nervous system. Frogs and fishes belong to animal groups among which we could almost certainly find ancestors; and it is not altogether improbable that the mammalian stock sprang from some very primitive member of the reptiles, among whom the tortoises are numbered.

Our nearest relations among the mammals are, of course, the monkeys. Our next nearest, it has plausibly been suggested, are the rodents and insectivores—rats, bats, squirrels, hedgehogs, and so on. Except for the prodigious development of his brain, man is in structure a primitive mammal (think of the elephant, the horse, and the whale; all of these are far more highly specialized in bodily structure than we). As a whole, mammals tend to be philistines; but it's an interesting fact that a taste for colour is confined, among mammals, almost exclusively to men and monkeys. Among monkeys and rodents are to be found our only cousins with anything like a capacity for true music; there's a singing ape (which goes up and down the scale in semi-tones), and a singing mouse. Strangest of all, perhaps, is a rodent of the pampas, the vizcacha, which has eumorphopoulos-like proclivities for collecting objects that take its fancy; such habits, too, though to a lesser degree, are not unknown among rats.

I'd at first imagined that all the elegances of animal courtship were employed for the sole purpose of alluring a mate. I soon discovered that this is far from the whole truth. Song and display are used more often, if anything, for signals of threat and defiance, than for the attraction of lovers. The robin's red breast is almost certainly displayed for defiance only. Threat and courting displays are often difficult to distinguish, and it's a rough rule of bird life that songs and displays which delight the female, enrage or terrify the male.

The aim and direction of the display instinct is unsteady, and incongruous impulses will often stir it; ostriches have been

known to display to air-liners, and a certain peacock, according to Darwin, would spread its tail for the benefit of poultry, and 'even pigs'. The origin of song is not clear; it may have evolved from accidental vociferations which became signal-cries to proclaim the presence of a male; it is easy to imagine how from this might have grown up the use of song both as a threat to rivals, and as an alluring love-call to mates. Many warblers tend to lose their song when the female arrives; they perform aerial dances, and it's difficult to distinguish those which are a part of formalized fighting from those which are to delight the eye and senses of a female. In these dual aspects of courting—terror and delight—may be seen, perhaps, in rudiment, those two aspects of art which have been known as the sublime and the beautiful.

Our poor relation the vizcacha is easily outmatched in connoisseurship by the magpie or jackdaw. But oddest of all in this respect are the Australian bower-birds which make, separate from their nests, bowers of courtship; and these they adorn with many alluring objects, shells, flowers, leaves, or bright pebbles. One, it is said, the satin bower-bird, actually paints sticks with berries and charcoal, using fibrous material as a brush. Most birds (and they're not alone among animals in this) make a ceremony of proffering nesting materials. I needn't tell you of the many fascinating displays that birds indulge in, dazzles of colour before which even the peacock languishes; I will only point out one thing before quitting the animal kingdom. Man—this is a platitude—is a tool-making animal. His paintings bear the same relationship to the visual beauty of animals that spades and weapons do to their claws. And now, after a brief interlude, I will try to apply to the magic and arts of men, what I've just vaguely outlined.

There exist two natural theories of art which I think should be mentioned here. S. Alexander in *Beauty and other forms of value*, suggests that our creative artistic instincts are derived from the constructive instincts of animals, as shown, for instance, by the bird with her nest, or the dam-building beaver. I was interested in this respect to read that some men consider the bird's nest to be the result and not a cause of mating antics—that the original nest was something like the sand-hollow made by certain gulls as they turn round to face the courting male. The building of useless, ceremonial nests is not uncommon among courting

birds. An element of this building instinct is doubtless to be found in a working artist: but not enough, in my opinion, to account for all the feelings in the wide kingdom of art.

The other theory was advanced by a professor from Basle named Karl Groos; he derives art from the play of animals. This, too, as I shall try to point out, has probably an important element of truth in it. But, again, it isn't enough. Play is an important activity, by which necessary practices are learnt and kept in trim; and all play, so far as I can make out is, however remotely, a mimicking of serious things. An artist when he works may be at play; but, if so, what is he playing at?

Before I go on, and try to persuade you that our æsthetic instincts and practices bear, to the courting ways of animals, a relationship analogous to that between our similar bodily structures, let me point out two other parallels of human and animal behaviour. Think, first, of the times you've given presents away. Were this a rational and purely human practice, you'd be able to reduce it, on impartial analysis, to a bargaining for favour, or to the purchase of affection. To my mind—and I think you'll agree—this is rarely the case; the act of giving usually pleases in itself. You are satisfying a primordial instinct that was born and not engrafted in you. You are handing out nesting material.

The other example is perhaps more frivolous. Have you never been to a function where you weren't quite correctly dressed . . . to the stalls at Covent Garden, for instance, in day clothes? Something of the sort must have happened to you. And didn't you feel, in spite of reason, at least a small degree of humiliation, a sort of disarmoured helplessness? This feeling arose, I suggest, not merely from the thought that many people, whose opinion you probably despised, were deciding that you didn't know the proper rules of behaviour; but you lacked, under those circumstances, the correct plumage for a defiant display; you were outmastered and out-fought, as a robin would be without his incarnadine breast. (There might well be an added, less unfriendly distress, from an inability to satisfy your instinct for the requisite communal display.)

Finally, let me add a piece of obvious but profound common sense from Alexander. A work of art, he contends, does not exist until it becomes an object, separable from the artist's mind.

The picture that you dream over in bed at night is not the structure of paint spread out on canvas which, in consequence, you make; the latter only is a work of art.

And what is a work of art? For now we're coming to the point. It's an exercise of unviolent strength. An artist in his work is assaulting, or capturing, or asserting his possession of some vision or feeling or knowledge; he is defying and scaring off a rival; he is displaying, or singing, or dancing, and that action is, in the world of spirit, an assault, a wooing, a crying out of 'I'm the king of the castle!' Bear in mind, though, that his work has a wider potency. You may be capturing the feeling that a wall is grey and rose in the daylight; to capture it you have used an ancient force to which human beings as well as the idea of coloured walls are susceptible.

Remember, then, all the elegances and oddities displayed in the connubial and courting and communal activities of animals; remember, too, that the impulses which govern these antics are delicately poised, and easily released. The nightingale, with his music, defies not only rivals, but the thunder as well; an ostrich may display to aeroplanes, or a peacock to pigs; and Darwin tells of a mandrill which turned his gaudy posterior to strangers by way of greeting, but, as we give up taking our hats off and shaking hands when friendship becomes intimate, just so did this monkey give up his ritual when acquaintance ripened into something deeper and more familiar.

We must now go on to the next generation in my pedigree of art. During courtship, animals employ, in their rudiments, dance and song and decorative display. Why do primitive men dance and sing, and adorn their bodies or exterior objects? Among savages, the purpose is almost invariably magical (not quite invariably, for even amongst the most primitive, we can find works which may be ranked as pure art and adornments probably born of sexual vanity).

When you swear at a piece of furniture that you've bumped against in the dark, or curse a faulty torch-battery in the black-out, in such explosions, you prove your mental communion with all savages, and with all beasts that have any capacity for conscious thought. Animism—in its sense of imputing to lifeless or unthinking objects a live and intensive personality—appears to be the endowment of every thinking creature. A dog bites the

trap that its foot is caught in (just as you swear at or kick the chair you barked your shins on); Berkeley's ideal world, where divine thought is the substance of all things, is no more than an infinitely delicate and elevated animism. A savage sees in everything which affects him—health, sickness, weather, and the increase of game and harvests—the acts and intentions of intelligent beings; and he has, moreover, peopled his universe with ghastly myriads of ghosts and evil spirits, all agog to do him harm or destroy him. It is generally true that, in his opinion, there can prevail against these invisible and intangible legions, no strength of limb and no material force. (The driving away of spirits by direct physical violence which prevails among some people—we ourselves are probably doing it with fireworks on the fifth of November—is, I think, an evidence of higher thought, which is attempting to make a rational universe, where all living things are at least vaguely related. In one Icelandic saga, a ghost-ridden farmer, obtains with complete success a legal eviction order against his uncanny and unwelcome trespassers.) But the savage possesses—so instinct tells him—unviolent powers by which, though now he knows nothing of it, once, in the person of his forbears, he charmed his mate and chased his rivals away. He mimes and dances; he scars and stains and adorns his body; he paints a pattern or a picture, and carves in wood and stone and ivory. The beasts that he feeds upon breed as usual, and increase; harvest-time returns; and, for a short tale of years, he is reprieved from the death which his unseen enemies so urgently desire and work for. To Rostand's cock it was certain the sun would never rise without his summons.

Amongst even the most primitive men whose behaviour has been well recorded, the Australian aboriginals, human logic has had a hand in their conjurations; they have already begun to act on the consistent but fallacious principles of sympathetic magic. Their sacred mimicry and drawings are not usually, however, as might be expected, representative, but most often formalized and diagrammatic. Especially is this the case with the Arunta tribe, who inhabit part of the central desert. When Spencer and Gillen were living with this tribe, they came on some paintings in a cave. These paintings, with a few exceptions, closely resembled the ritual decorations of totemic ceremonies, where such designs had detailed and definite meanings.

Most animals, as I've said, have an instinct for play, and this instinct is of inestimable value to a species, for in play are acquired and rehearsed actions which are necessary or of aid to survival. The ceremonial antics of animals have a purpose beyond them; but in play, the creature has no sense of remote benefits, and this is an instinct whose satisfaction has become almost an end in itself.

When they were asked the meaning of these rock-drawings, men of the Arunta replied that they meant nothing, they were just play (in ritual use they would have been filled with meaning). The utilitarian art of magic has become purely æsthetic; and it is, I think, significant, that among these 'play' diagrams were the only attempts at realistic art which were found among the works of this tribe.

The biological success of an animal species depends very largely upon a power of varied response, which will enable its members to meet successfully as many dangers as possible and to endure all alterations of environment. Man, though geologically of a very tender age, is probably the most successful animal that has yet appeared on the earth. He is able to live under the most diverse climates, and he has repelled or controlled innumerable and most varied living adversaries, from microbes to mammoths. Such success, and the survival of so tender-bodied a creature, presuppose unparalleled powers of adaptation and response: and many of his responses will seem to be useless. In his expressions of emotion, in his sad tears and angry cries, may be traced, according to Darwin, vestiges of actions which once directly served his ancestors. Is it surprising, then, to find alive in him a delicate and intense instinct, which no longer serves its original purpose, and which is of no particular use in overcoming the dangers and difficulties of life? (I have often thought that the distress of boredom is really a sort of sublimated terror. In boredom our powers of response seem to be suspended or stupified; and an ancient instinct warns us that this is no state of mind to be in, if we're to safely face sudden and unsuspected danger.)

It is, I believe, the ambition of scientists to correlate all the forces of the universe—to be able to speak of one in terms of another. This desire to tidy things up seems to be a common one; man is frightened at the inexplicable and, as early map-makers, abhorring the unknown, filled up blank spaces with

curious attributes, ordinary men will believe the silliest of superstitions rather than leave anything unexplained (high-faluting, moral and transcendental readings of art are, to my mind, no more than superstitions). You'll have gathered that I've been trying to correlate the æsthetic activities of man with others of his that have known physiological causes (I've assumed that inherited instincts are due to something in the material substance of our brains). I now propose to indulge another common instinct, namely the instinct for instructing other people in their business. I propose to tell you what I believe to be the nature and cause and function of a picture. I ask your pardon for the indispensable platitudes which will be involved.

I don't have to tell you that, when you paint a picture, you aren't 'copying' the objects before you (that was the word used by a village child, when I asked where a painter friend of mine was: 'Copying the Bull,' was the answer). I think there is no picture at all which attempts in that way to be a statement. Even when, as you've often done, you make a drawing to record a particular scene, the composition has no important relationship to that element in the work which is purely informative; the topography can be just as accurate or otherwise, if a tree, say, is in the middle of the drawing, or one-third of the way out from the side. Something in the object, or associated with your vision of it, has impelled you to make a pattern on paper or canvas. What that impulse may be, I can't say, though I think it is here that the psycho-analytical aspect of art may at times come in; possibly something in the exterior disposition of things may resolve a hidden conflict or distress in that part of your soul where complexes lodge.

I'll digress a little now, and give part of my reason for not being able to accept from psycho-analysis a full natural explanation of art. If you had a suppressed penchant for very young girls, and I for goats, it's not likely that the same symbols would assuage all or both of those hidden passions. Savages, who have trampled on their desires for foods or mates forbidden by their particular taboos, are likely to find symbols which clinically would be quite useless to both of us. We tend to suppress the passions which are forbidden by our society. I think that this variation in morals may be a cause of the strangeness which we find in exotic art; but the psychological value is quite distinct

from the æsthetic, which can appeal to diverse moralities; they've got about the same relationship as have the colour of a purge and its medical efficacy. One can imagine works of art impelled by crushed incestuous desires, and which could delight both us and the pedantically incestuous Ptolemies. I can't look on art as just a sort of mental hygiene.

What you have done in making a picture is to woo something bound up in the state and aspect of the exterior world, and to proclaim it as your own; you have indulged the exercise of an unviolent power; you have employed the devices of courtship and conjuration; it's your display. The finished picture is a transferable and marketable charm. (I've read of savages who bought little statues as charms to cure barrenness and other evils. If these statues failed of their object, they were often sold at a loss.)

We must now look more closely into the art of painting, for I want to show you in it *all* the ceremonies of animal courtship. We can pass over the obvious display of colour and pattern; it's this side that is emphatic in painting. But what of dance? And song?

Nothing, it might be said, could be more stationary than a picture or a piece of sculpture. Yet watch a man who holds a small carving in his hand, or stands in front of a large picture; he turns his hand this way and that, and moves his head and eyes. Our eyes are so made that we can see with clearness only a little part of the visible scene. Even in a small drawing, we have to 'run our eye' over the lines and brush-strokes; those lines and those strokes are frozen and perpetuated gestures, in which are implicit the movements of the artist's body and limb as he made them. The stillness of visual art is only relative.

To speak of music and song as part of the visual arts may seem fanciful: to attempt to prove them such, hopelessly so; yet I mean it all but literally—not even as Roger Fry meant when he said, if I remember right, that every stroke of Gainsborough's seemed to be accompanied by music. I began my whole case by stressing the close association of speech and gesture; our sounding speech, there's little doubt, is derived from the songs and caterwaulings of our animal ancestors; but sufferers from aphasia will often make the same errors in writing that they do in speech; hand and tongue are alike the instruments of language. The central Australians, when ritual silence is imposed upon them for a long time, make use of an elaborate gesture language, which is

understood between communities that haven't a spoken language in common. Even a stolid Englishman will gesture and 'raise his voice' in anger, betraying thus the parents and origins of his speech. If you accept the rôle which I've given to gesture in the visual arts, it's barely metaphorical to say that we can find here, however faintly, a true though silent music; the sound of it is translated back into gestures.

Having disposed thus summarily of the artist, it's time to examine the onlooker. His response can be divided into two parts, which may not unreasonably be called feminine and masculine. You yourself have probably often caught yourself listening to music, or reading, pleasurably, but with clouded attention; this pleasure, indeed, may be very great, and many people attain to no more. They are indulging their feminine power of response to the ceremonies of courtship. (I don't want the word 'feminine' to be too closely scrutinized, for male animals are known to give a sort of hypnotized response to visual signals from the female.) This drowsy, thoughtless delight is present, I think, in the enjoyment of the most intelligent listener or spectator; but to it he adds a positive, masculine response. (I should point out that we're descended from ancient bisexual animals; we have many parallels in our body to sex characteristics of the opposite gender; men and women can therefore reasonably share both masculine and feminine powers of æsthetic response.)

All animals, almost, have an instinct for mimicry, by which they learn their necessary ways of life; sometimes, as in the case of parrots, and many members of the crow tribe, this instinct is developed to a fantastic degree. An intelligent and sensitive man, beholding a picture, mimics in his thought the actions and feelings of the artist as he made it; not only is he charmed like a peahen before the splendours of the male, but he has also indulged that intense joy which is felt at the instinctive expense of power; he's become, for the time being, by imitation, an artist.

These masculine and feminine responses presume a knowledge that the object beheld is artificial. I've got little doubt that we are also pleased by works of art in the same way that we are pleased by natural objects, flowers, and mountains and waterfalls; it is this pleasure which predominates in ignorant appreciation, and which is so greatly stirred by the bad painting that we call academic (even when the work is well done, the anti-pattern

of it dulls much of our sensibility to the skill, and we tend to look on the picture as something other than art). It's perhaps worth while examining this pleasure, and seeing if it, too, can be found consistent with none but prehuman instincts.

Darwin remarks in one place that lands which are dull-coloured are often inhabited, no matter what their climate, by dull-coloured animals; and he suggests, in the diffidence of a foot-note, that this may¹ be partly due to the fact that animals need to be educated in their taste for a colour by their surroundings, before they can enjoy its appearance should fortunate variation throw it up in a mate. Animals, it is implicitly suggested, must know of a colour or pattern from the outside world before their appreciation is likely to breed it into their species.

Remember now the almost life-wide prevalence of animism. The world, to our deep instincts, is a living creature, and in it we see—or our ancestors saw—marks and colouring to which, seeming animate, they responded as though to the displays and markings of a living creature.

At such spectacles, too, the animal instinct of curiosity taught them to look inquiringly for decorations which would make delightful and enticing adornments were they on the body of a mate.¹ You must remember, also, that savages cannot recognize a great separation between themselves and the lower animals; their outlook is anthropomorphic. The savage in us, beholding the outside world, and imputing intentions to its sound and motions, may well look upon a landscape as we look upon a mate; and to this mate of rocks and stones and trees, the artist displays, like that peacock of Darwin's in front of pigs. (May we not find here a rational definition of that indefinable but useful expression, 'pure art', which many critics have accepted and used without any theory of art to explain it: 'Pure' art, I would suggest, is a display which is made in response only to the material attributes of a thing—a response which neglects the emotional, psychological and intellectual associations. At its simplest such art is mimetic, and tends to the reproduction or description of the stimulating shapes and colours and qualities of the object.)

¹Many weeks after I had written this I read in HORIZON, July 1944, p. 61, in Naum Gabo's letter the passage where he tells how he discovers his forms, in clouds and leaves and trees, in rivers and waves, even, sometimes, in the track of a falling star.

Alexander suggests that it is by a sort of mimicry that we enjoy landscapes; even those of us who cannot paint a scene will dream a picture into it. There's certainly much truth in this; but if you follow up the thought, a problem looms very like 'Which came first, the hen or the egg?' I believe personally that the art of landscape-painting presupposes a delight in, or an emotional response to landscapes, before ever a picture was painted. There's another way in which we can enjoy, or increase our enjoyment of landscapes, and that is by an understanding of their origin. In a valley, or glacier, or volcano, or old lava-flow, we discover a frozen movement; we see the bite of the elements, or the leap of fire, now all crystallized and still. Even the more or less steady world has a perpetual dance for those with eyes to see it.

I remember your saying once that naïve art—children's drawings, and so on—wasn't just different from mature art, but that it was altogether another kind of art. It has occurred to me this impression may have arisen because one ingredient of mature art is greatly deficient. A child, or a naïve spirit, may pick by instinct on the telling pattern; the musical and gesture elements, implicit in drawing, are so uncouth and clumsy as to be negligible; what we see is only a stationary and silent display of plain or coloured pattern. This would account for the charm of such work; we see immediately the abstract pattern, and it's probable, I think, that we enjoy it less as a work of art than as a natural object; the more complicated responses are not set in motion.

Naïve art mustn't be confused with primitive; primitive art is often very skilfully accomplished, and in that sense mature. The chief characteristic of primitive art is, I believe, its use of already existing forms. The splendid polychrome bison which gallop and stir over the cavern roof of Altamira are almost all of them painted on or around bosses and swellings of the rock, to which the artist has imparted additional life. A primitive artist, following his animistic sense as it responds to material, enhances a life that is already there; a civilized artist imposes life on to his material. These elements, of course, are never altogether separated; we can only class an artist in this respect by the preponderance in his make-up of the primitive or civilized.

I've set out here, as I promised, only the bones of my hypothesis; I've not been able to give you the many persuasive

examples I've found to support me: nor the various opinions of wise men which I was able to quote in my favour. But I hope that from this skeleton you'll be able to assume the state of mind needed for testing my case. However, since it isn't quite satisfactory to apply my principles to one art only, I'd like to persuade you that they can be fitted equally well to literature. Of music, I'll say next to nothing; first, because its connection with the analogous animal display is very obvious; secondly, because I haven't got the requisite knowledge. I can experience the most intense pleasure from music; but I am ignorant in this art, and my pleasure—except at heaven-sent moments—has a far larger proportion of feminine appreciation than is the case with painting and literature; and it so happens that I have no friend who's a composer, and from whom I could learn of the inward working that goes on during composition. Music is the art that shows most openly its aboriginal form; and to say that our music arises from the same source as do, from animals, their songs and cries—this wouldn't in itself be a hypothesis that needed much defending. 'Let's all sing like the birdies sing' is a vulgar theme; though few who sing it seem to inquire just why the birdies do sing: and still less do they wonder what we are at when we do the same thing ourselves.

I was most put out when I first tried to fit the arts of literature into my scheme. I read that an electrical stimulus, if applied to that part of an ape's brain which in us would produce speech, gave rise to nothing comparable (the research referred to was somewhat inconclusive; the higher apes are so rare on the market, and so expensive, that it hasn't yet been possible, I believe, to perform experiments enough for reaching any very reliable conclusion). However, on reading and reflection, the problem seemed to become less difficult. Speech—it was agreed by most authorities—arose from song in association with gesture. A sedate Englishman gesticulates, and raises his voice from time to time; and there's good reason for believing that early languages had a far greater variation of tone than prevails in most present-day speech. Among modern civilized peoples, the ancient-tongued Icelanders have a musical, bird-like quality in their utterance; and in Chinese, it's necessary to learn the tone of a word, or you can land yourself, I've been told, in odd and embarrassing ambiguities. Logan Persall Smith has suggested

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that we have a substitute for gesture in many English idioms, old and new, that imply general or bodily movement: *stand up* to, *run out* of something, *put a brave face on*, *fade out*, *play up*, *take in*, *hand it out* to some one, and so on (you'll be able to think out many others yourself). There survives—or did survive until very lately—an elaborate whistling language in one of the Canary Islands; and there is that equally elaborate Australian gesture language. The use of *words* may be purely human, but our speech, with its tones and accompanying gestures, shows a lineage of dark and immeasurable antiquity.

My difficulty had been the same that has confused and perverted so many critics of literature; I was assuming that we employ language—like a sort of morse code—solely as a means for communicating facts and ideas. It's anything but that. How often, for instance, do we talk solely to pass on information? Our ordinary talk is usually one of those corporate displays which seem to be common among gregarious animals. Even between acquaintances and intimates, it's more often an improvised ritual than the exchange of knowledge (that's why mutual silence may be a sign of great intimacy where ceremonies of courtship are no longer needed); imprecations convey no knowledge. Parrot's talk is a sort of song; and so is ours.

To many savages, an object and its name are one and the same stuff; for this reason, a man's name is often kept secret, since its knowledge to another would be a sort of physical possession, and as dangerous in a sorcerer's hands as excrement, or the clippings of hair and nails. Such an attitude of mind survives among civilized men in many taboos and etiquettes of conversation. It's for this reason, probably, that we allow only to accepted friends the use of our Christian names (the relics, I am assuming, of our 'real' names, our surnames being either tribal or descriptive); we put them into the possession only of people we believe we can trust with them. Among some eastern nations it's not good form to speak to a man, except by circumlocution, of his wife; those facetious expressions 'the missus', 'mother', 'my old woman', 'the old girl', 'my better half', have become perfectly serious to many an Englishman. Popes, and sometimes kings, assume formal names on their accession. We still, like savages, look upon words as though they were material objects.

Well, if to the animal in us our speech with its gestures is

a song and dance, and, to the savage, the ingredients of conjurations, literature can easily show the same ancient lineage as the other arts. Indeed, only the link between speech and animal display was obscure; literature more than any other art is intimately bound up with magic; most charms are in verse; secular drama, from which fiction was born, can be traced to ritual; and ritual, even the most holy, is a child of magic.

The incantatory nature of poetry is self-evident; but a little further thought is needed to bring prose into the primordial fold. The distinction between poetry and prose is a problem which can provoke much bitterness; and I have ventured to suggest that prose is the gesture element in literature, and poetry the song (the formal arrangement of the writing doesn't matter). The words of prose are gestures with a meaning to them, as when we point out something in the visible scene; words in poetry are notes of music. In the subject-matter the pictorial suggestions link prose to the visual arts. With narrative and fiction we may discern a formal ceremony, closely related to myth and holy drama. The catastrophes of esteemed tragedies probably stand in the place of ancient obligatory sacrifices, which they have etherially replaced.

It isn't perhaps irrelevant to remind you here that the letters of our alphabet are derived from the representations of actual things; in our M, for instance, we still have the conventional zigzag image of water, which is found in Egyptian art, and its name, I have read, comes from the Phoenician name for water. Written and printed words are, like uttered speech, more than a means of communication; they are visible language.

I've tried to digress as little as possible in this letter; but the subject is a large one, and it's difficult, in so compressed a form, to introduce even necessary allusions which may not seem irrelevant at first sight. To disentangle whatever confusion there may be, let me recapitulate.

In animal display we find the exhibition of pattern and colour, together with what may be called dance and song. The purposes of display are to defy rivals and to warn them from private territory, to attract a mate (whether old or new), and sometimes to be a sort of binding link among gregarious animals. The mechanism which releases a display is very delicate, and may react to seemingly false and irrelevant occasions—although these

can usually be attributed either to error, or to forms of emotion not distantly related to those of fighting, courtship and comradeship.

Among primitive men, dance, song, and the display of ornament—now showing as what we can begin to call art—are principally used for magical purposes; losing the old animal intentions of these antics, and feeling within himself a capability of unviolent power, he uses them to control intangible forces, wind and storm, the spirits of abundance, and all manner of ghosts. Then, like an animal playing, he mimics his ritual, and produces art that is purely æsthetic.

Man, I presume, has no *instinct* for magical practices as such. A little reflection will, I am sure, reveal to you the innumerable qualities which the construction of an art-work shares with magic. You know how many superstitions are embedded in our common behaviour; these are traditional, not instinctive turns of mind; we have learned them. Yet they play a large part, I think, in our attitude to art; the indignation felt by an ignorant or hide-bound man at new forms in art arises, perhaps, from his inward fear that a new ritual has displaced the old and proved one; who knows, something in him wonders, if, to this incantation, the sun will rise again, or the season of harvest return? Unfamiliar forms strike him like blasphemy; art, let me remind you, is brother to that other great child of magic, religion.

I've tried to expound, and not to persuade; but perhaps it isn't altogether irrelevant to show that a like line of inquiry might be fruitful in other fields; and it may not be out of place to suggest what advantages the acceptance of some such 'natural' theory might have on the practice and criticism of art.

I have often thought that perhaps all our sense of wonder and mystery might be traced to ancient animal instincts lingering within us. Some thinkers have concluded that our codes of morality are founded ultimately on a rational view of society: these rules, they suggest, are utilitarian in intention and arrived at by a sort of corporate reason, and conscious reason can follow the lines by which these conclusions might have been reached. Now, if we are indeed gregarious animals with the appropriate instincts, these instincts are likely to prompt us, from layers of our souls deeper than reason, to praiseworthy actions. When a man is impelled by reasonless commands to deeds which reason

approves of, it isn't difficult for him to impute his impulses to a force outside him, which he endows both with reason and morality. The stern daughter of the voice of God may be whispering to us, not from heaven, but from the drenched and steaming forests of the coal-measures. But does it matter much if the sand-worm or mandrill are guiding your brush, or a poet's pen? I mentioned my hypothesis once in a letter to Laurence Binyon; his answer was, 'I am more interested in what a thing becomes than in what it has been'. I myself happen to be interested in the origin of things; but I, too, believe, like Binyon, that it has no bearing on their present value. The depth and quality of feeling stirred by great art keep their intensity, although they may be the echoes of brutal magic or jungle struggles—and not intimations of immortality.

In plainer matters, I think it would do many people no harm to realize that art is an activity on its own, and not a branch of the social services. How often have you read clever but silly critics (the attributes are not incompatible) first imputing alien obligations on to art, and then judging a work by their own invented and irrelevant standards? The artist should have a broad back, but unfortunately it has too often happened that, after such castigation or misguided praise, he's modestly accepted false standards, and his work has suffered for it; witness—if you'll let the lately-born old fogey in me have a word—the dull quality of writing in some of our middle-aged and younger poets (the war, by endowing an old word with a fresh meaning, has aptly fitted it to such work—austerity).

Art is a social act of conjuration and display. It has its own set of values. If an artist promotes in his work the well-being of humanity, so much the better; he's an excellent man: but it has no bearing on his excellence as an artist. (I could have applied here again my simile of the purge and its colour.) However, if you should happen to want the excuse of social obligation for your way of life, there's probably an element of communal display in art-works which increases the cohesion and comfort of human beings; and as for that divine secret spark in our souls to which art so tenderly ministers, there's a lot to be said for pleasures that harm no man, that needn't cost us much, and that don't require fighting for.

Well, these are roughly the lines on which my essay was built,

and on which, though faulty, it still stands (or I hope it stands). You've probably had enough of the subject already; but if I can find time enough to put the work into a better shape, and if you should then find a little interest still lingering in you, I'd be more than happy to let you have a look at it. And if the arrival of this letter seems to put on you the burden which you hate even more than I do, that of writing an answer—don't worry. You have unwittingly given me cause to be grateful to you; your imagined presence as I write, and my attempts to make things clear to you, have cleared my own mind, and helped me to work into my theory corrections whose necessity at first somewhat disconcerted me.

CHRISTOPHER SHOOT

WAITING FOR LUNCH

HE sat down in the darkest corner of the vast hall of the Whitehall Club and looked at his watch. It would be some time yet before his host arrived.

With a shiver of revulsion he glanced at the group of figures round the midday telegrams. Their white faces were headlights in the gloom:

'The sallow, oval faces of the city

Begot in passion or good-natured habit.'

Their trouser-seats shone like rear-lights: warnings to the world to avoid the office stool. From time to time one of them would peel away to greet a guest, lost in the vast unfriendliness of the crowded hall.

'Ah! there you are. Like a wash and all that sort of thing?'

They would hurry to the cloak-room, their enamelled foreheads nodding affably.

Similar greetings by the entrance steps began to follow in such quick succession that it was like watching some Scotch reel: the exaggerated wave of the arms—'Ah! There you are . . . '—a dance on tiptoe—'I hope I'm not late . . . '; and then the purposeful wheel off to the left towards the cloak-room in full chatter. Amazing the conformity of it!

Over by the fireplace was a gathering of elderly members: civil servants, journalists, lawyers, and doctors.

'Extraordinary disclosure in *The Times* city column this morning. See it? . . .'

'I remember once when I was on the Bench a fellow . . .'

'Yes, the whole department are behind it . . .'

The trailings of conversation echoing round the pillars, the dim electric light hardly penetrating into the gloom of the lofty dome, and the steady stream of shiny-suited men pirouetting on the marble floor, added to the depression which had been growing in his mind all the morning.

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Depression had started in the bus on the way to the office four hours earlier. He had balanced his black bag on his knees and read the morning paper over his neighbour's shoulder. Impossible to get a paper himself. Arriving in London a few days ago he had felt an outcast; no roots, no prescriptive rights in the place, nothing to call forth the shopkeeper's favour. But why want a newspaper? No news in them. He had more news now in the bag lying on his knees than all Fleet Street had had for months. Yes, that was the dilemma. The Government alone knew what was going on and what was being planned. Yet he and his contemporaries inside the machine were stifled and impotent. To them, knowing was no good. Incredible how little had been done by them to mould the world of the future to their ways. They sold out along the line while continuing to provide the old gang with the alibi they needed.

'Parliament Square,' called the conductress. He shuffled off the bus with a crowd of clerks and administrators, and crossed over Whitehall under the protective arm of a policeman. In a beam of sun on the pavement the other side he stopped. No, perhaps after all everything wasn't quite as bad as he'd been thinking. There was something exciting and reassuring about the sun shining down on the busy crowd, on the red buses, on the confident face of the policeman, on the hands of Big Ben, on the spires of Parliament, on this throbbing heart of world-wide Government. Forgetting himself in a spasm of romantic dreaming, he moved on towards the office.

'Good morning, Sir,' the porter greeted him with old-world courtesy.

‘Good morning, Sir,’ said the messenger, opening the door of his room for him.

He unfastened his bag, took the papers out, sat down at his desk and began to read through them.

‘Atomite In Dryadia.’

‘Relations With The Luritanian Government.’

‘Views of the Legation In Robod.’

All night these papers had nagged at his brain; all the way to the office, too, though he had tried to suppress them. For one brief moment in that ray of sun by Parliament Square he had succeeded in banishing them from his thoughts. But now, with the meeting in only half an hour’s time, they were eating into him again and he got up irritably to pace the room. The curse was having to work through the Minister. This second-fiddle frustration had plagued him ever since he had been recalled with the Minister from Robod.

The meeting took place in a sunless room. Apart from several hat-stands, the only furniture was a long table surrounded by chairs. Officials from various departments sat with their elbows on the green baize cloth waiting for the chairman to begin. The chairman opened by referring to the presence at the meeting of the Minister and First Secretary from Robod. As if to clear his brain he made a few rambling remarks about the vital importance of atomite in the modern world, and then with startling precision—the target seen suddenly through the clouds—he rapped out:

‘The crux is that we have reason to believe that a private Luritanian Company, as a result of atomite surveys which they are carrying out over the whole of Dryadia, are likely to obtain an exclusive atomite concession from the Dryadian Government in the near future. At the same time we are being pressed by one of our own atomite companies for subsidies and diplomatic backing to enable them to undertake immediate surveys and to obtain just such a concession for themselves before the Luritanian Company have collared the field.’

The chairman paused, lowered his spectacles, and looking at the Robod Minister went on:

‘With this picture in mind, perhaps you will explain to us the alternatives as you see them.’

The Minister shifted in his seat and, dog-like, turned his handsome head slightly on one side; it was an old trick of his, this

unbiased, eager-to-learn turn of the head. Like the chairman, the Minister sidled coyly round the subject for a while before coming out with:

‘The alternatives then are these: To subsidize our own company and to exert pressure on the Dryadian Government. This is what the company ask. Such a course is open to the overwhelming objection that it would inevitably lead to bad relations with the Luritanian Government.

‘Alternatively we can stand aside and do nothing. This would mean that the Luritanian Company would get the concession and we would suffer, not only economically, but in prestige, all over Dryadia and throughout that part of the world.

‘Thirdly, and this is the course that I urge most strongly, we should open discussions at an early date with the Dryadian and Luritanian Governments for a proper pooling, in the interests of the people of the whole world, of the atomite resources of Dryadia.’

As soon as he had finished an official on the other side of the table pounced on him:

‘This suggestion of a pooling of Dryadian atomite; wouldn’t that mean Government interference with the atomite companies?’

The tone of his voice was that of a barrister putting the final deadly question to a witness in a murder trial. As the Minister replied, ‘Yes, it would,’ the official sat back in his chair, smiling triumphantly.

Further down the table someone said:

‘The Minister has stated that to allow the Luritanian Company to obtain the concession would mean a serious loss to our prestige throughout Dryadia and that part of the world. This argument I cannot follow. For it is a lesson of modern times that the exploiter is a despised, resented being. Surely, our position would be correspondingly enhanced, if we stood aside, the disinterested friend, while another Power incurred the odium of exploiter.’

There was a murmur of agreement round the table. Everyone looked at the Minister. Nobody spoke. Then the chairman, looking down the table and with a flourish of the hand, called: ‘The First Secretary’.

Something had to be said quickly to answer this misleading attitude. Something emphatic. . . .

‘The point of view just expressed may be applicable today to

many parts of the world, but it does not meet the facts of Dryadia. There it is power that counts. Power alone. And above all the power of the purse. If the Luritarians once get this exclusive concession and the influence and position which will accrue, then we will be quite unable to maintain the prestige and respect in that part of the world which we hold today.'

Perhaps it was spoken a little too dramatically, but the inability of these people to understand the atmosphere of Dryadia launched one into fury. Meanwhile there was argument and rejoinder from all sides of the table. It was when everyone had become quite excited that the Chairman, having listened like a father to childish squabbles, put an end to it all by saying:

'To avoid misunderstanding and, perhaps, to save all our time, I think I must explain that this morning before the meeting I had a talk with my Minister. He has discussed this matter informally with his Ministerial colleagues and is strongly opposed to raising the question at the present time on the lines suggested by the Legation. The issues are too big; the snares too many. That is the way his mind is working and he believes it also to be the attitude of his colleagues. This meeting of officials, therefore, if it is to propose a contrary course, and to hope for its acceptance, will have to be both united and most determined in its recommendations.'

Of course the thing was hopeless from that moment. The meeting was doomed. But it made one sick; the lack of a lead; the negative approach; the old men playing for safety again. Not just the Ministers, but their advisers and departmental high-ups too. From the satisfied look on his face it was clear which way the chairman had advised: 'pin down the wings of progress immediately they flutter into daylight; pin them down one by one on the setting board'.

His chief had his handsome head on one side now and was making a charming protestation, but it was no good; a waste of indignation. This crowd would never understand the root of things in Dryadia. Why though, why had the Government bothered to get the Minister and he to fly all the way from Robod? No, it wasn't really a mystery. They realized how much easier it was to fight from the distance of Robod than near to it. It was to stop all that tough stuff over the telegraph wires that they had been recalled. It was for the same reason, to allow a whirling of

the fists before closing with a clinch, that this meeting had been arranged, and the discussion allowed to go on so long before being killed by the Chairman's bombshell. His Minister was selling out now:

'But if the Government have decided otherwise then, of course, it is not for me to go on pressing. However, I must emphasize that it was not without a full appreciation of the situation and sentiment in Dryadia that I put forward my proposals; and, feeling strongly as I did, I could not rest until I had carried them to the highest quarter for consideration by all those responsible for our future strategic and economic policy throughout the world.'

What humbug! He never felt anything strongly except keeping up the appearance of the strong man. If it hadn't been for the enthusiasm of the Robod Chancery he would never have taken up his present attitude.

Across the table now some official who that morning, as on every other morning for the last twenty-five years, had travelled up by electric train from the suburbs and who, regular as clock-work that evening, would return to his neat little garden, wife and family, in time for supper, was making a mechanical statement on behalf of his department. Thousands of miles of desert, hundreds of years of civilization, and tens of degrees of temperature separated this Whitehall world from that of Robod.

He remembered the young Second Secretary coming into his room in the Chancery at Robod a few months ago when the subject of Dryadian atomite had first arisen. Together they paced up and down excitedly. It was too hot to sit still and talk. Their bare knees and open necks ran with sweat in the damp evening air. Overhead the fan gyrated.

'Here's our chance to do something big for a change instead of the old pilgrimage, or the drug traffic, or the camel trade. Now we can strike a blow for progress. Dryadia will provide atomite for everyone—atomite for everyone, everywhere.'

'But what about the Minister. He's keen to make a name but he doesn't really belong to the modern world.'

'No, he's on the other side of the line between the moderns and the ancients; but we'll drive him on shoulder high.'

There was something intoxicating about Robod in this hour of the evening just before the heavy fall of night. From the

minarets came the muezzin's wailing call to prayer. Down in the narrow, stuffy alley-ways long-robed figures kneeled languidly and kissed the beaten floor. Save for the quick nibbling of the goats and the buzz of flies everything was still and sultry. Up out of this intensity rose the coral spires of the city to cast the last long shadows of day across the desert. And far away in the desert a camel tribe was huddling down for the night in its black mohair tents and singing praises to the new wealthy whites, the givers of gold and bringers of wealth. For these whites had lorries, and wireless, and water-freezers, and were now drawing meat from tins and wine from bottles following a hard day's searching after atomite.

In London they understood none of this. Yet it was London—lacquered skins and shiny seats—that decided.

* * *

Over the dream of Dryadia and the memory of the morning's meeting, the hall of the Whitehall Club—the gloom, the throb and the voices—swam again into focus before his eyes. He looked at his watch and as he did so he heard a voice close by:

'Ah! There you are. Like a wash. I hope I'm not late.'

He rose quickly.

'No, of course not. Fine.'

They moved towards the cloak-room talking eagerly.

OLIVIA MANNING

POETS IN EXILE

A CRITIC in England, reviewing a copy of the Cairo poetry magazine *Personal Landscape*, said of the poets now in the Middle East: 'It is surprising how quickly they have lost touch'. Actually, of course, there is nothing surprising about it and nothing necessarily alarming. After the entry of Italy into the war had closed the Mediterranean, a manuscript took three months to reach England. When it failed to arrive, many more months would pass before the sender could discover that he must post a duplicate. Anxiety and expectation failed during such long waiting and writers ceased to look homewards. Shortage of news

and publications from England, and the realization that years might pass before we saw our friends and families again, produced a sense of isolation and a need for intellectual contacts. Writers began to circulate their work in typed copies. Later, magazines like *Personal Landscape*, the revised *Citadel*, *Orientations* and *Forum* began to appear. It would be a mistake to suppose that these isolated poets and prose-writers have not developed at all because they have not developed in the same way as their contemporaries at home. Whether willingly or not, they have become cosmopolitan; they have met and been influenced by refugee writers of other countries; they have learnt foreign languages not commonly learnt by English people and so absorbed new literatures. The character of poetry written out here may suffer from being outbred as that written in England during the same period may suffer from being inbred. Our own war experiences are typical of most of the civilian writers out here. In Bucharest, where we had been sent by the British Council a few days before the outbreak of war, we went through the sensational year of the Rumanian revolution and collapse, when Jews and, later, Englishmen, disappeared from their homes to reappear, if they did reappear, seriously crippled. We were warned by friends that we were on the Guardists' 'lists', but orders to move on were received from London only after the entry of the German army of occupation. Then we were sent to Athens. Half of the journey had to be done on the German Lufthansa. We arrived a few days before Italy presented her ultimatum to Greece and we left on the last civilian ship after the Germans had broken the Thermopylæ line.

When we first arrived in Athens, without possessions and from an occupied country, we were almost curiosities. But another British Council man, Robert Liddell, the novelist, had had similar experiences. He had gone through the Russian bombing of Helsinki and made an equally uncomfortable escape. Bernard Spencer joined us after the Italians had made one of their few hits—this time on his Salonika hotel.

The British Council has given a number of young men the chance—for which Spender asked in *HORIZON*—to experience events as vividly as war correspondents without the obligation to write to order. In addition to Spencer and Liddell, Dr. H. L. R. Edwards, the Skelton scholar—once described in *Life and Letters*

as one of the hopes of modern Welsh poetry—was lecturing in Athens. He has written very little during the war period, which he feels to be necessarily a period of creative inactivity. Down in Kalamata was another writer, Lawrence Durrell. He was attached to the British Council but had made his own way to Greece years before.

Tied to their jobs, these men could do no more than try to live as normally as the war would let them. Robert Liddell did this most successfully. While German troops were massing on the Græco-Bulgarian frontier, he leased and furnished a house under the Acropolis escarpment and started to translate Politis' *Eroica*.

Bernard Spencer's wife had gone home just before the fall of France and could not get permission to return. This separation, that both knew might last for years, possessed his thoughts and his slowly written poetry. He wrote:

Letters, like blood along a weakening body,
move fainter round our map. On dangerous wings,
on darkness-loving keels they go, so longed for;
but say no memorable things.

The 'dear' and 'darling' and the 'yours for ever'
are relics of a style. But most appear
mere rambling notes: passion and tenderness
fall like a blot or a burst of tears.

Now public truths are scarce as sovereigns,
what measure for the personal truth? How can
this ink and paper coursing continents
utter the clothed or the naked man?

This new, deeply felt emotion gave to his work a force and poignancy it has sometimes lacked before. Just before the German attack, the Council seconded him to the Fuad al Awal University in Cairo where he is still a lecturer. We who were left behind said good-bye to him, knowing there was every chance we would spend the rest of the war in German prison camps.

During the last days, while the Allied wounded were pouring hopelessly into Athens and the *Luftwaffe* was destroying Piræus, escape seemed impossible. When an old steamship was found to evacuate the remaining English civilians, Robert Liddell

abandoned his newly furnished house as philosophically as he had leased it. He, Harold Edwards and Harold's newly married Greek wife, shared with us and three others a two-berth cabin in the depths of a ship that had last been used to transport Italian prisoners. As all the passages had been boarded up to prevent escapes, we did not think it worth while sleeping in life-belts. A number of Greeks, including Seferis and Elie Papadimitriou, came with us. Larry and Nancy Durrell, who had not been warned in time to get to Athens, escaped from the south in an open caïque. Before they made Crete, they spent days among the islands, keeping their infant daughter Ping-Ku alive with tinned milk heated on a primus. When they eventually got to Alexandria, the Egyptian officials kept them in the desert behind barbed wire for some days. Durrell is now working with the M.O.I. in Alexandria.

The first shocking impact of the Middle East numbed everyone. It took months to get over it, and longer to become reconciled to it. Resentment of the squalid shabbiness, the dirt, exposed diseases, beggary, luxury and heat, produced in the refugees an overwhelming nostalgia for Greece that filled their writings and began to bore friends who had not been there. Some of the refugees, who had lost everything, lived for months in extreme poverty. One of those who had to spend the hamsean season in a poor hotel in Cairo was Elie Papadimitriou, a gifted poet and the most important woman in E.A.M. At this time she wrote her long recitative from *Anatolia* and herself put it into vivid, exact English: other poems followed, all haunted by Greek suffering, but not for that reason blind to the scene around her. Here are the last two verses of her poem describing Cairo:

O meidans and sharias of Cairo,
healing
as your river rises and sways
the Feloukas up to rich gardens!
Its infallible mud protects life.
You, also, meidans and sharias
take us in your wisdom which breeds
as many colours and gestures.
Also the merciful law
which defines that low salary
is more humiliating than begging.

Never, O Egypt, I wish you,
in return I pray you may never,
attain the fate of Europe.
Watch these Europeans.
Watch how they go past mute.
How they loiter, well fed, well washed.
The well-paid, flattered soldiers
from the ends of the earth;
youth born, with few words,
whose womenfolk, in misty, noiseless
villages at the end of the earth,
believe that it is a sacrilege to yell
'Where do you take our men?'
Therefore, they multiply,
numbered or numberless,
methodically drunk or clear eyed,
the doomed myriads from many paths,
corpses on the sands and the waves.

Long may you live, monkeys, mice,
dwarfs with plastered faces,
snakes coiled between two black breasts,
acrobats, barrel organs,
that honour life and men.
And we following any one cart procession,
in the glory of so much female fat,
may we cleanse in life-giving dirt
the futility of our destiny.

Gradually writers began to absorb their new environment and to become, to some degree, reconciled to Egypt. They began to admit in their work the curiosities and beauties of a country that, beneath its flattening, white light, offered the naked desert, the crowded, lushly cultivated delta of the peasant, the filth and opulence of the towns—a country that resembled no other in the world. The sense of a greater, past civilization that had left its monuments and mummy-bones everywhere, of the varieties of life superimposed one upon another, and the fact that Cairo, a city putting the tourist first in all things, was the relaxation of men on leave for a few days from the nearness of death in the desert, heightened the senses and put an edge on the nerves.

Exile, nostalgia and uncertainty produced in poets a variety of responses. Tiller, Spencer and Durrell have in the Middle East written poems that stand comparison with the best of their contemporaries at home. These poets, from no choice of their own, are civilians and have the great advantage, denied most Service men, of surroundings in which they can work. If their poetry is outbred, it is not the rootless, neurotic produce of the expatriate, but is outbred only as a result of the assimilation of foreign cultures and new surroundings and experiences. It seems pointless to discuss Tiller's fine poem 'Coptic Church, Musturrud' in terms of his being 'out of touch'.

Nevertheless, the sense of exile colours everything written here. One chilly night in Jerusalem, while the Germans were at El Alamein, half a dozen of us sat in the poor light of a hotel dining-room reading poetry to each other. 'Think of it,' said the Greek Seferis from his dark corner, 'exiles reading poetry to each other'. Many of the poets out here are refugees; all are exiles. Seferis, because he is not only the best of the younger Greek poets but also a man of unusual intellectual power and sympathetic personality, rose to a high position in the Free Greek Government that was recently turned out of office, but he is haunted by the conviction that he should have remained in Greece with his friends. The sense of a missed experience, that no alternative experience can dispel, haunts most of us. Seferis should have suffered in Athens; we should have gone through the London blitz.

Had Seferis written in English, French or German, there is little doubt that he would already be known abroad as an important poet. As it is, he is probably unknown in England except to the subscribers to *Link*, a periodical devoted to modern Greek studies. *Link* published a brilliant piece, written by its editor, N. Bachtin, on Seferis and his fine translation into Greek of 'The Waste Land'. George Seferis is about forty. The literatures of Greece and France were the background of his education, but the strongest influence on his work has been that of T. S. Eliot. As a result of his awareness of himself as a product of mixed cultures, he is preoccupied with the necessity of finding a myth that will express a ruling unity over our unstable civilization. From Pretoria, where he was *en poste* for many months in 1941-42 (and hating it) he wrote to the editors of *Personal Landscape*:

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'We are going backwards to spring between strong winds and extraordinary thunderstorms. There are nights when I wake with the feeling that I am a golden fish in a bottle of electric liquid. It is an atmosphere of sick childhood; stimulating with dryness, stimulating in a bad way. I am trying to write whatever I can from limericks to metaphysical poems. I think that limerick-writing is a good exercise for lonely men and suppose that the genre has been created in England, because all of you are lonely, like islands. But the interesting thing is that it brings forth a sort of individual mythology.'

Indeed, the frightening sense of being alone that Cairo has imposed on all of us, led to a remarkable crop of limericks. These were probably the expression of social—and to a lesser degree, sexual—frustration, and attempts to create and hold together a circle of friends who spoke the same language. Their function in the oppressive, time-wasting, despairing atmosphere of Egypt, was to reassure the writer that his values were not merely personal. Other people could feel as he did. Comparison with Upward and Isherwood's *Mortmere* fantasies immediately come to mind. In a town centred in war that recognized the war only to profit by it, life for British civilians was doubly unnatural. To those of us who had been exhilarated by the Greek fight for freedom, the indifference, waste and dishonesty of the vast, profiteering Levantine population of Cairo was an unending nightmare. Not that Greece had not had its nightmare moments. Evil ruled, but was swept—if unwillingly swept—into war by the unbreakable spirit of the people. Bernard Spencer, in a poem about the air-raids on Salonika, pins down in the third verse the neurotic, secret-police-ridden atmosphere that pervades all countries in the Balkans and Near East:

The fear of speaking was a kind of tic
 Pulling at the eyes. If stranger drank with stranger
 It seemed thief drank with thief. Was it only every
 Night, the fall of the early and lampless dark?
 I remember it so often. And the lie,
 The twist of reason,
 The clever rumour planted in the nerves,
 The dossier infecting like a coccus;
 All these became for us the town, the season.

When we arrived in Cairo, Spencer had settled down in new

café corners and, paler and leaner than ever, was writing infrequent poems that were full of nostalgia for the Greek islands. Tiller (lecturing at Fuad al Awal University) and Durrell are presumably well known in England now, but Spencer has not published at home since *New Verse Anthology*. He has long deserved a wider public. His poems are in the direct tradition of English poetry, and are marked by sincerity, exact observation, and a deep feeling for nature. They are patient, honest, individual, and always come out of the life he is living. Unlike Durrell's work, they never pretend to be more than they are; unlike Tiller's, they never give the impression of straining after something not quite realized. Spencer's tone is unmistakably his own. His values, likes and appetites are recognizable by the average man as normal and universal. (In this he resembles MacNeice, but he has none of MacNeice's dazzle.) He abhors flashiness and is very careful not to let slickness run away with him. Fidelity to his experience is all important to him. He relies on level statement for much of his strength, but on the rare occasion when he is saying something that demands slickness, his command of technique is obvious. Here is part of his recent poem called 'Behaviour of Money':

Money was once well known, like a town hall or the sky
or a river East and West, and you lived one side or the other;
Love and Death dealt shocks,
But for all the money that passed, the wise man knew his brother.

But money changed. Money came jerking roughly alive;
Went battering round the town with a boozy zig-zag tread,
A clear case for arrest,
And the crowds milled and killed for the pound notes that he
shed.

Hearing the drunken roars of Money from down the street
'What's to become of us?' the people in bed would cry:
'And, oh, the thought strikes chill,
What's to become of the world if Money should suddenly die:
Should suddenly take a toss and go down crack on his head:
If the dance suddenly finished, if they stopped the runaway bus,
If the trees stopped racing away?
If our hopes come true and he dies, what's to become of us?'

Among the younger men whom the army has brought out here, Keith Douglas stands alone. He has been in contact with the enemy much of the time and he is the only poet who has written poems comparable with the works of the better poets of the last war and likely to be read as war poems when the war is over. Hamish Henderson, John Waller and G. S. Fraser spent some time in Cairo. Henderson, too, has seen heavy fighting and has written one or two good poems, but his work is less individual and accomplished than that of Douglas. Fraser, at his best, produces pleasant, Georgian verse. In Jerusalem, Stephen Haggard, the actor, was publishing poetry in *Forum* and, when he died, was working on a novel. Archie Lyall, Press attaché in Belgrade until the collapse, has worked in Jerusalem and Cairo. In spite of his impressive list of pre-war publications—including Lyall's *Languages* with its multi-coloured pages—he has written very little in the Middle East. He is one of the few writers out here with established reputations and one of the few whom the war has silenced. Dorian Cooke, founder of 'Seven' and originator of the naïve Apocalyptic theorising, has produced some nerve-ridden, feverishly intense verse. He may develop, but at present his work is over-excited and overladen with adjectives and images. He cracked up while getting his parachute flash, but recovered and is now with Tito. Among civilians, Romilly Fedden (lecturer at Fuad al Awal University) is working on a long poem to be called 'History of the Plains', and John Speirs (also lecturing at the University) has published work in *Scouting*. Speirs' wife, Ruth, has published locally some of the best translations yet made of Rilke.

Palestine, a country that for all its history tends to rouse irritation rather than the imagination today, has given little to the writers whom the war has brought to it. Herbert Howarth, assistant Public Information Officer in Jaffa, has done his most remarkable translations from the Egyptian Arabic. It is probable, however, that the biblical memory that gave rise to one of his finer poems 'Branches of the Family' was prompted by thoughts of Palestine, even though the Ark is said to have set forth from Iraq and come to rest in Sinai. Here are the four middle verses:

Everyone came into the ark
Beginning with the priest who lifted
His beard and vatted navel
And left his chosen water,
The place where a flag of veto blew.

The girls came by ages
The tiny ones with the angry rash
On the bottoms and back thighs
Those with coal-coloured moles like butterflies
Closing round the spine. Then those
With level chests but learning modesty.
Afterwards those with narrow and wrong days
Whether they wore damask or calico.

Even the males were admitted
Although God did not care for
The fur on their shoulder-blades
Nor for their bags, compact
Unwieldly or deficient.
The last word was save the people.

This at the opposite extreme
Of the earth's salt and central basin
Where a millennium since
Two cousins rose together
And cracked their ribs to heave a girder
Up to the human scaffolding.

This is one of the least obscure of Howarth's poems which tend to be involved with the unjustifiable *voulu* obscurity of the Surrealists. He is, however, among the youngest of the men writing out here, and it is probable that his obscurity results from a mentality unusually active and fanciful, and not yet mature.

There is undoubtedly a danger that a writer 'out of touch' is finished if it is life with which he is 'out of touch', but the body of work produced out here during the last three years gives ample proof that writers in the Middle East are in close touch with the life around them. Since it is fairly certain that writing in England, especially during the war, has been suffering from inbreeding, the new work being done here may take home a strain that will prove of real value to the stock.

SELECTED NOTICES

RECENT POETRY

Green Song and Other Poems, by EDITH SITWELL. (Macmillan, 5s.)

A Lost Season, by ROY FULLER. (Hogarth Press, 3s. 6d.)

Chosen Poems, by FREDERIC PROKOSCH. (Chatto and Windus, 6s.)

The Sun My Monument, by LAURIE LEE. (Hogarth Press, 3s. 6d.)

The Burning of the Leaves, by LAURENCE BINYON. (Macmillan, 2s.)

Shadows of Chrysanthemums, by E. J. SCOVELL. (Routledge, 5s.)

I INDULGE myself by reviewing only poems which I like in this number of *HORIZON*. This is partly due to laziness, but it is partly, also, a tribute to these poets. To review them with a dozen or so versifiers would be to suggest that the poets and the versifiers are occupied in doing the same thing, whereas actually, they are doing something quite different. There would be more point in reviewing Miss Edith Sitwell's new poems together with a novel of Virginia Woolf or of Elizabeth Bowen than with poets X—and Y—, who have nothing in common with Miss Sitwell except that they produce books printed in uneven lines.

Miss Sitwell is a striking example of the development which future critics will probably come to think of as characteristic of poets in our age. In her early poems, she was preoccupied in creating her own language and her own world. To some extent the language was wilful and the world was artificial; although she always wrote poems in which there were tenderness and compassion, with lines and whole poems of ravishing beauty. The most significant fact about these early poems is that they were insulated by her own peculiar sensibility from other poems being written at the time and from the whole flood of language and ideas in the outside world. It is in her later poems that the outside world has entered, as an enlargement of the experience which she is capable of creating in her own highly developed language.

There are parallels for the growth of Edith Sitwell's poetry in the poems of T. S. Eliot, Yeats, Rilke and Stefan George. All these poets were preoccupied in their early work, in differentiating their experiences from those of the people around them, emphasizing the special nature of their own sensibility, insulating their language from everyday language. The result was a certain cliquishness

and even preciousness in their first poems. When one considers the situation of modern poets, the reasons for this become obvious. Every poet has to hammer out his own standards, he has to create a language which can be distinguishable to himself from the general decay of modern language and the general decline of literary standards, he has to remain true to his personal experiences which are more real to him than the enormous public events which hammer at us but which are *real* to very few minds indeed.

The greatness of these older modern poets, who can be said to have achieved their maturity, is that they have not shrunk into themselves. They have grown, through their own personalities, into an understanding of common experience, and they have brought their language closer to idiomatic language.

In Edith Sitwell's recent poetry this process of simplification and enlargement has taken place. Although her voice is entirely her own, it has become the voice of a world-wide suffering. This is the more remarkable, because she never writes directly about actual events, as Yeats in some of his later poetry did, nor does she enter directly into a current argument as Eliot sometimes does. She always expresses herself in a symbolic language. Every idea with her is translated into a symbol before it is expressed; it is expressed always as the symbol and not as itself. Thus she comes close to the Yeats of *Byzantium*, but never to the Yeats of *Easter 1916*; and she is closer to the Eliot of *Ash Wednesday* than to the later more sententious Eliot.

Only a quotation of a whole poem can illustrate Edith Sitwell's use of symbolism and imagery. This poem is called *A Young Girl*:

Is it the light of the snow that soon will be overcoming
The spring of the world? Ah no, the light is the whiteness
of all the wings of the angels

As pure as the lily born with the white sun.

And I would that each hair on my head was an angel,

O my red Adam,

And my neck could stretch to you like a sunbeam or the
young shoot of a lily

In the first spring of the world, till you, my grandeur of clay,
My Adam, red loam of the orchard, forgetting

The thunders of wrongs and of rights and of ruins

Would find the green shadow of spring beneath the hairs of
my head, those bright angels,

And my face, the white sun that is born of the stalk of a lily
Come back from the underworld, bringing light to the lonely:
Till the people in islands of loneliness cry to the other islands
Forgetting the wars of men and of angels, the new Fall of Man.

This poem is written, like a parable, entirely in the language of pictures. It has a radiance which shines through every line. When one compares Miss Sitwell's later with her earlier poems, it is apparent that her poetry has become simplified and purified by a process of selection and limitation. The most comprehensive and statuesque symbols are used: Adam, the lion, the sun, the night, Christ, Cæsar, flames, bread, the young girl, the young man, and so on. These symbols are used nakedly and without complications. Light is repeatedly contrasted with darkness, spring with winter, the skeleton with the flesh, frost with the heart, and so on. The themes of the poems have a quality of largeness and breadth which is almost grandiose. In addition to all this, the poems are, for the most part, written in broad, flowing metres. The whole effect is of a golden measure and a rich light, a rhythmic, stately, sunlit background across which move the ghosts, the frustrated lovers, the childless women, the skeletons, the young girls, of Miss Sitwell's inventing. With all this brilliance of simplicity, there is at the same time subtlety of music which she has never achieved before. Above all, these are spaciouly planned, architectural poems.

The other poets on my list (with the exception, of course, of Laurence Binyon) have not achieved work comparable in any way with Miss Sitwell's. They are all poets in that early stage when they are establishing their own language, proving their own sensibility. In a genuine sense, they are all 'promising', and that is why they are so interesting.

Roy Fuller is perhaps not the best of these younger poets, but he is the one who may have the greatest possibilities of development in the future. He has a narrative gift, which is very rare, and which surely has great possibilities, if it can be developed. His poems are easy to understand, straightforward, intelligent and serious. They often strike one as mere notes of rather sharp observation which are made interesting because they are so well written. Many are about Africa and the observation is always fresh:

The green, humped, wrinkled hills: with such a look
Of age (or is it youth?) as to erect the hair.
They crouch above the ports or on the plain,
Under the matchless skies; are like the offered
Shoulders of a girl you only half know.
What covers them so softly, vividly?
They break at the sea in a cliff, a mouth of red:
Upon the plain they are unapproachable,
So massive, furrowed, so dramatically lit.

This is clean writing of an honest, inquiring, intimate mind. Fuller's theme in Africa is chiefly the contrast between the landscape which is so absorbed into its own immensity of size and atmosphere, with the feelings of the soldiers with their small memories and emotions, which they try to project into this impassive African scene.

Just as the lives of lions now are made
Shabby with rifles,
This great geography shrinks into sad
And personal trifles.

For those who are in love and are exiled
Can never discover
How to be happy: looking upon the wild
They see for ever

The cultivated acre of their pain;
The clouds like dreams,
Involved, improbable; the endless plain
Precisely as it seems.

His poetry produces a moving effect of homesickness. It is not the poetry of an extraordinary person, but of an ordinary person with normal feelings, who sees his emotions and his environment through a telescope. In one of his poems he explains:

I thought
Of nothing but the word *humanity*:
And I was there outside the square of warmth,
In darkness, in the crowds and padding, crying.

One can be very grateful for this normal and honest writing. And one may note at the same time that Mr. Fuller has just the qualities of contact with ordinary people and human aspirations which are required from a narrative poet. I would like to see a long narrative poem by him about the experiences of the men and women he knows against a background which he can observe sharply.

The superficial merits of Frederic Prokosch are by now so familiar that some of his readers already show signs of having worked through them to the apparent weaknesses behind. Glamour, melody and obviousness are not counted amongst the merits of modern poetry, so unless the reader can read deep meanings into a poem, he is inclined to feel cheated. I am conscious, having written the last sentence, of Mr. Graves reading it over my shoulder, and asking 'Whom do you mean by the reader?' The answer is that I really think there is a danger of many readers tiring of Mr. Prokosch's poems when they discover that they are rather superficial. But much poetry with charming melody, facile sentiment, and glamorous imagery has pleased people in the past and still pleases us today. Mr. Prokosch has his own lush vein and the less self-consciously he pursues it, the less he examines and criticizes the quality of his own thoughts, the better. This volume of his *Chosen Poems* is a delightful experience, as good wine or as an exquisitely grilled red mullet is delightful.

The Greeks now draw their shimmering nets ashore
And evening drifts across the wandering sea
Caught in the web of some long
Chambered, archaic dream

And as I stare across the delta, it seems
They draw forth silvered fishes from their hearts
That glitter through the twilight,
Then perish in their palms.

I would have Mr. Prokosch woozier and woozier, so long as he can be woozy with precision. The trouble is that in his later poems he shows a tendency to be self-conscious and literary. His danger is that he may lose faith in the qualities of his own imagination.

Laurie Lee is an impressionist poet. His poems have no structure, no technique beyond the immediate requirements of producing a brilliant impression. He evidently concentrates his mind on some vivid sensation and then produces words with the aim of fixing this sensation. A too-marked metre, the necessity of searching for a rhyme, careful punctuation, would distract him from his aim, which is to create the sensation of an object by means of words, not to charm us with the delights of form and a sense of words. His poetry is also almost untouched by thought.

This is very hit-or-miss writing, and Mr. Lee is the poet whose future seems the most uncertain of the writers reviewed here. For his stimulus is entirely in his sensations and not in language or in ideas: notoriously, our sensations grow weaker as we grow older. The great advantage of poets who care for poetry as such is that language itself gradually becomes for them an experience: words and metres and melodies are constantly passing through their minds, and what is called inspiration is only the impulse which precipitates the crystallization of a form which is already potentially there. Thus the growing sense of language in a poet's mind fully compensates for the weakening of sensation. Indeed, quite apart from this, I doubt whether sensations such as Mr. Lee describes are our most significant experiences.

The only powerful influence on Mr. Lee seems to be Lorca: a very bad influence on English poets, as Senor Barea has pointed out at considerable length: for English poets are attracted by what seems bizarre and unconnected in Lorca's dazzling imagery, and often they fail to see the hidden links of the Spanish tradition in his poetry.

Here is an example of the Lorca influence at its worst:

I hear the girl beside me rock
the hammock of her blood
and breathe upon the bedroom walls
white dust of Christmas roses.

Nevertheless, in many of these poems, Laurie Lee succeeds in doing what he sets out to do; producing, that is to say, a sharp sunlit impression:

I watch a starling cut the sky
a dagger through the blood of cold,

Unfortunately the next two lines are:

and grasses bound by strings of wind
stockade the sobbing fruit among the bees.

Stockade, which is commonly used as a noun, surely suits awkwardly with 'cut' in the first line: "The starling cuts, and the grasses stockade" is the use of two verbs in the same sentence, both of them objects of "I watch". This is the sort of objection a critic is bound to raise because poems are made out of words not out of clear eyes and intense passions. I am so conscious, though, of the eyes and the passions of Mr. Lee that it is an ungrateful task to have to criticize him. There are pure and lovely lines in his poems, such as the following:

The hard blue winds of March
shake the young sheep
and flake the long stone walls;
now from the gusty grass,
comes the horned music of rams,
and plovers fall out of the sky
filling their wings with snow.

If he took more interest in words and in the formal qualities of poetry, his effects would be less precarious. As it is, their very uncertainty has a charm of its own.

Miss Scovell is a notable addition to the small and distinguished company of women writing poetry. Her poems have sensitivity, delicacy of feeling, beauty of observation. They are not new to me. I have admired them since about 1929; but it is a pleasure to see them collected. Perhaps the best way of conveying their quality is to quote a short poem called *A Field*:

The field is bounded by four hedges built of may
Like stone. There, seen or unseen, the blossom is given,
Jets out from the deep springs of time all day;
Gone, is replenished. The scent floods for its season.

The grass in the square field is thin as wire, as dew;
Erect each grass, tarnished like colour under the moon,
With roseate mist, a fire-reflecting smoke run through.

The short and brittle-seeming, cloudy grass
Peoples this framed and empty field as souls do heaven.
That travellers stare from the gate and cannot pass.

Readers will recognize in this some quality in common with K. J. Raine, Lilian Bowes Lyon and Ann Ridler. It is the sensitive effect which is the contribution of women to modern literature. Some of these poems are about children. Their mood and their themes are familiar and will surprise none. But they are beautifully written and observed.

A version of Laurence Binyon's title poem to his last slim volume, *The Burning of the Leaves*, has been published in *HORIZON* and will be familiar to readers. Like Binyon's best poetry it has integrity and beauty, but also there is an excessive diffidence which produces an effect almost of tameness. Binyon's feelings are too genteel, and in the war poem at the end of this book, one feels that the war is a rude interruption to his delicate vision, which turns away from it back to the beauties of nature and art. Many people will sympathize with him in this. Yet, at the same time, beauty is not an alternative to insanity and death and 'blind convulsions', it is the creation of a pattern in which these harsh and ugly things are integrated. Binyon cries out:

War, war in the brain, in the obstinate will
war in the brain, war in the will, war
No refuge or hiding place anywhere for the mind

These words surely come very strangely from the magnificent translator of the *Divine Comedy*. Can Binyon have thought of the *Inferno* as a 'refuge' or a 'hiding-place' from the world of wars? Perhaps, really, his creative genius is shown more in those translations than in his own poems.

I am afraid that none of the poets above belongs to any school or party, or wears any label. These poets are not apocalyptic, or super-realists. Where their poetry is difficult it is either because they have difficult experiences to create, or else because they have not succeeded in expressing them. One of these volumes—by Miss Sitwell—will take its place beside Yeats and Eliot in modern literature. All are worth reading, because all are by honest and intelligent people who have something to say.

STEPHEN SPENDER

AN ANTHOLOGY OF SOVIET VERSE

Sbornik Stikhov. Edited by V. KAZIN and V. PERTSOV. Moscow, 1943, pp. 576.

At last it is possible to get a coherent and complete picture of the kind of poetry written under the Soviets. For years we have had to rely on imperfectly informed opinion and on the haphazard methods by which Russian books come to England. But this anthology really shows what Soviet poetry is. It includes poems by fifty-three authors and gives a liberal selection from each. It begins with the October Revolution of 1917 and ends with 1943. Twenty-five years is of course a short time in the history of any art, and we can hardly expect a book of this size to maintain throughout an equally high level of excellence. But it is agreeably surprising to see how much good poetry has been written in Russia in this period. Much of it may not last the ordeal of the years, but at the moment, when Russia is largely an unknown land, it is extremely interesting to have this intimate and illuminating information about it.

The anthology sticks strictly to its dates. It does not even include revolutionary poetry written before October 1917, and we look in vain for Mayakovsky's *Our March* or Khlebnikov's *Freedom for All*, both of which were written too early. But to make up for this there is much that we might not expect to be included and which is all the more welcome for that reason. Almost everything that Blok wrote after 1917 is here, *The Twelve*, *The Scythians* and *To the Pushkin House*. There is an apocalyptic poem by Blok's friend, the anthroposophist Andrei Bely, in which Russia is addressed as a Messiah of the future. There are some interesting poems by the old Symbolist Valery Bryusov. Anna Akhmatova, so long condemned to silence, makes a most welcome reappearance with five poems, four of which are quite recent and show that she has lost none of her old charm and dexterity. Most surprising of all, there are twenty-one poems by Esenin, including his wonderful *Letter to my Mother* and an excellent choice from his last poems when he felt himself neglected and despised and found a new grandeur and pathos. There are of course omissions. Perhaps Sannikov is no great loss, though there was a time when he seemed to have a real lyrical gift. But Mandelstam ought to be here. His *Tristia*, published in 1923, is great poetry, intense, imaginative and independent. Can it be that Mandelstam has incurred the disapproval of the authorities? If so, it is time that he was forgiven and restored to his rightful place. Against this we can set a mass of familiar and unfamiliar writers who are in tune with their times. Mayakovsky, of course, holds pride of place with over a hundred pages. The choice from his voluminous works is well made, though we should welcome some of his more ecstatic early pieces and at least one of his poems on love. There is a good selection from the strange and exciting Kamensky, from the realistic and imaginative Tikhonov and from a large number of young poets who have found themselves with this war. The result is a book with very various contents and much to excite the curiosity.

The picture that emerges is of a poetry passing through violent changes and entirely altering its character. The first poets of the Revolution were either Symbolists or Futurists. The Symbolists, who saw in 1917 the beginning of a Second Earth, were soon disillusioned and passed to silence or death. The Futurists, who owed something to Marinetti's cult of violence, enjoyed the

Revolution and embraced its cause with avidity. In Mayakovsky they had a leader who knew how to adapt his art to the times and to keep himself well in the public eye. Their chief gift was a capacity for conveying violent excitement and adventure. Khlebnikov's *Night Before the Soviets* and Kamenskys' poem on Stepan Razin have a kind of heroic grandeur, a truly epic spirit. This impulse soon ceased, and was succeeded by a new phase in the early 'twenties when poetry was optimistic and dynamic but had not yet surrendered its independence to social considerations. The great figures of this time are Pasternak and Tikhonov. The first, one of the greatest poets now writing in Europe, has an extraordinary sensibility and wonderful visual gift; the second, who is a soldier and a man of action, infuses his poems and ballads of violent life with a peculiar brilliance and vitality. In the late 'twenties poetry suffered from politics. The best poets took to translation and the creative output was small. It was not easy to write the kind of poetry which the authorities demanded, and even if it was written, it had little interest. Even Mayakovsky gave up the struggle in 1930, and his imitators like Aseev and Bezymensky seem to have felt the same obstacles to free expression. Before this war the situation was already improving, and since 1942 there has been a spate of entirely new poetry. This poetry is simple and direct. It appeals straight to the heart and is written in the language of every day. Naturally it is largely concerned with the war, but it is so sincere and so deeply felt that it is by no means merely topical. In Simonov the Soviets seem to have a young poet who may well become a master.

This progress from the apocalyptic majesty of Symbolism and the anarchic violence of Futurism to a simple, orderly poetry is indicative of the problem which the Soviets have had to face in literature as in the other arts. Since they believe that all the arts serve a social purpose and must have a political character, they are in danger of destroying them or at least of reducing them to a dull mediocrity. Under the Five Year Plan this happened. . . But the devotion of some few great spirits has saved the situation. The new Soviet poetry is both good and popular. The standard of technique has been restored by a study of the Russian classics and poetry has been kept in touch with life because the poets now writing are young men who have been brought up under the Soviets and know what they are writing about. They really are natural and simple and they find no difficulty in writing poetry which can appeal to anyone. Just as the Soviet films combine a very high level of execution with a sincerity and integrity which seems to be beyond the reach of Hollywood, so the Soviet poets, who have learned their technique from Pushkin and Lermontov, have a directness and truth which suggest that their country is once again about to enter on a creative period of literature.

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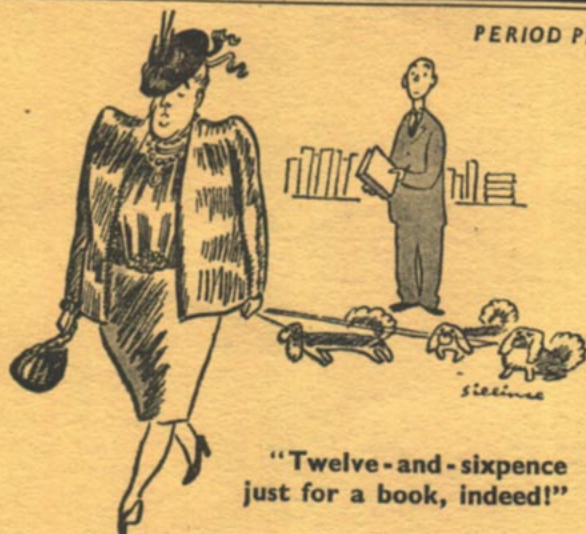
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